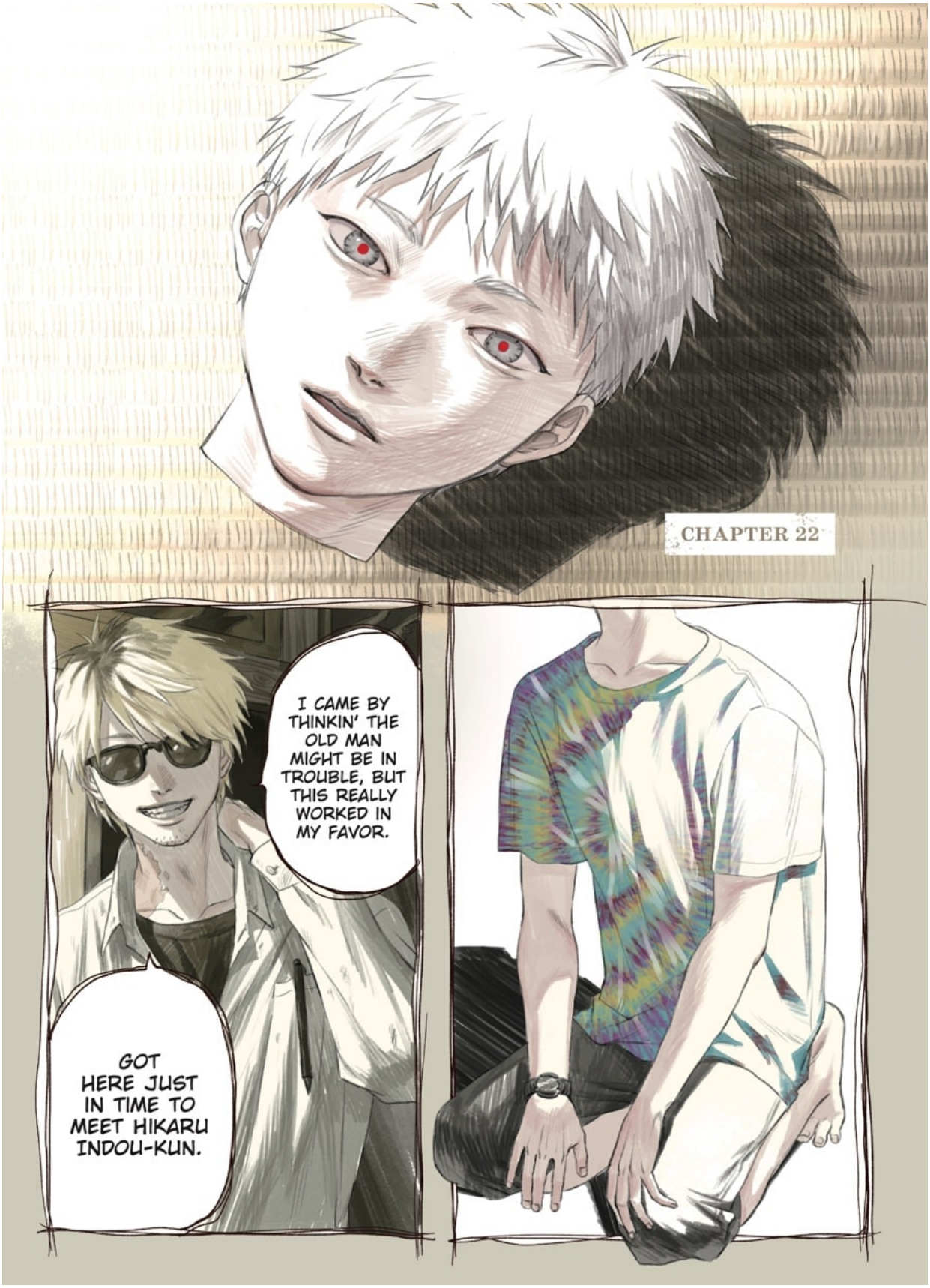
MOKUMOKUREN

5

THE SUMMER HIKARU DIED


CHAPTER 22
I CAME BY THINKIN' THE OLD MAN MIGHT BE IN TROUBLE, BUT THIS REALLY WORKED IN MY FAVOR.
GOT HERE JUST IN TIME TO MEET HIKARU INDOU-KUN.

THE SUMMER
HIKARU
DIED
Mokumokuren
5
CHAPTER 22

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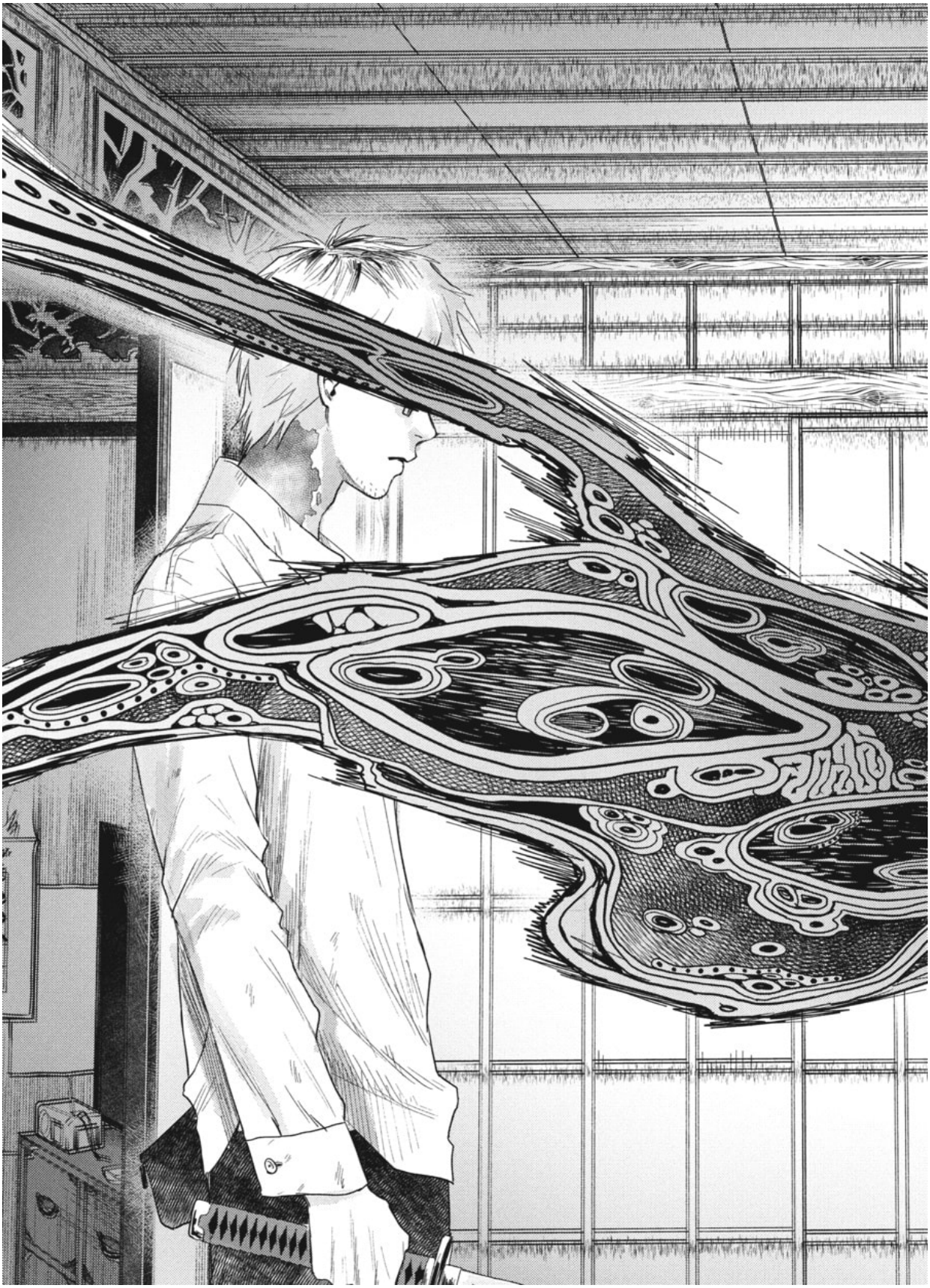
H—
HI...
HI-KARU?
?
IS HE DEA...
?
WH... UH?

...

.....



ACK!
わ
WOOSH
SMAK
HA HA HA HA HA!!

THUD
HAAH!
HAAH!
STICK! STICK! STICK! STICK! STICK! STICK!
C'MON, STICK! STICK! STICK! STICK! STICK!
SHIT!
WHY...!?
IT WON'T STAY ON!
BLOW UP
BLOW UP

RAAAAAAAAAAAGH!
スゥ…
SHF…
SWOO…
HFF…
HAAH…
WO·OZE

MURMUR
MURMUR
ABOUT AN HOUR...
HOW LONG HAS HE BEEN UNCONSCIOUS?

WHAT WERE YOU DOING AT TAKEDA-SAN'S HOUSE...!?
YOSHIKI... ARE YOU OKAY!?
BOLT
WAAGH!
MOM...
IS IT TRUE!? THEY'RE SAYING OLD MAN TAKEDA WENT BERSERK, AND YOU AND HIKARU TOOK A TUMBLE.
APPARENTLY, SOME SCHOLAR WHO'S STAYING IN TOWN BROKE IT UP?

I DON'T CARE ABOUT THAT.
IS HIKARU ...?
"IT'S NOT ENOUGH FOR THE POLICE TO GET INVOLVED— JUST A BIT OF VILLAGE DRAMA."
LOOKS LIKE THAT'S HOW THEY'RE SETTLING IT. IT'S RIDICULOUS.
EVEN IF I DID FILE A CLAIM, NOTHING WOULD COME OF IT...
WAIT...A MINUTE...
DON'T TELL ME THE POLICE...
HE'S IN THE NEXT BED, SLEEPING...
SWISH
...BUT HE HASN'T WOKEN UP YET...

BUMP
バカ
BUMP
THUMP
THIS SWORD ...
I SNUCK IT INTO THE TAKEDAS' HOUSE IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY, BUT IT PROVED TO BE PRETTY USEFUL.
IT DID A FINE JOB CUTTING THAT THING. JUST AS EXPECTED.
THAT CONFIRMED THE SITUATION FOR ME. TOOK LONG ENOUGH.
I'M SERIOUSLY LUCKY THAT IT SHOWED UP IN THIS ERA.

DOES THAT MEAN I'VE JUST ABOUT ACCOMPLISHED MY GOAL?
AND THAT THING'S PRETTY FASCINATING. NOT ONLY DOES IT HAVE ITS OWN SENSE OF SELF, BUT IT ACTUALLY WEAKENED ITSELF!
TANA-KA!!!
BUT... IF THAT'S THE CASE, THEN...
WHAT THE HELL HAP-PENED ...!?
THEY'RE SAYIN' HE HAD A HEART ATTACK.
SOUNDS LIKE... MY OLD MAN AIN'T GONNA MAKE IT.

...!
I DIDN'T NOTICE QUICKLY ENOUGH.
...IT'S MY FAULT.
...SORRY. I RUSHED OVER, BUT I DIDN'T MAKE IT IN TIME.
HE WAS TELLIN' THE TRUTH?
SO MY OLD MAN...
...SAYIN' THAT STUFF ABOUT BEIN' NEXT...
AND ONCE YOU'VE DISCOVERED THEM, THE MORE FRIGHTENED YOU GET, THE MORE EASILY THEY CAN TARGET YOU.
THAT'S JUST HOW IT IS, AND IT'S WHAT HAPPENED TO BOTH MATSUURA-SAN AND YOUR FATHER.
...MEANS IT'S ALSO EASIER FOR THOSE BEINGS TO SEE YOU.
...SEEING BEINGS FROM THE OTHER SIDE...

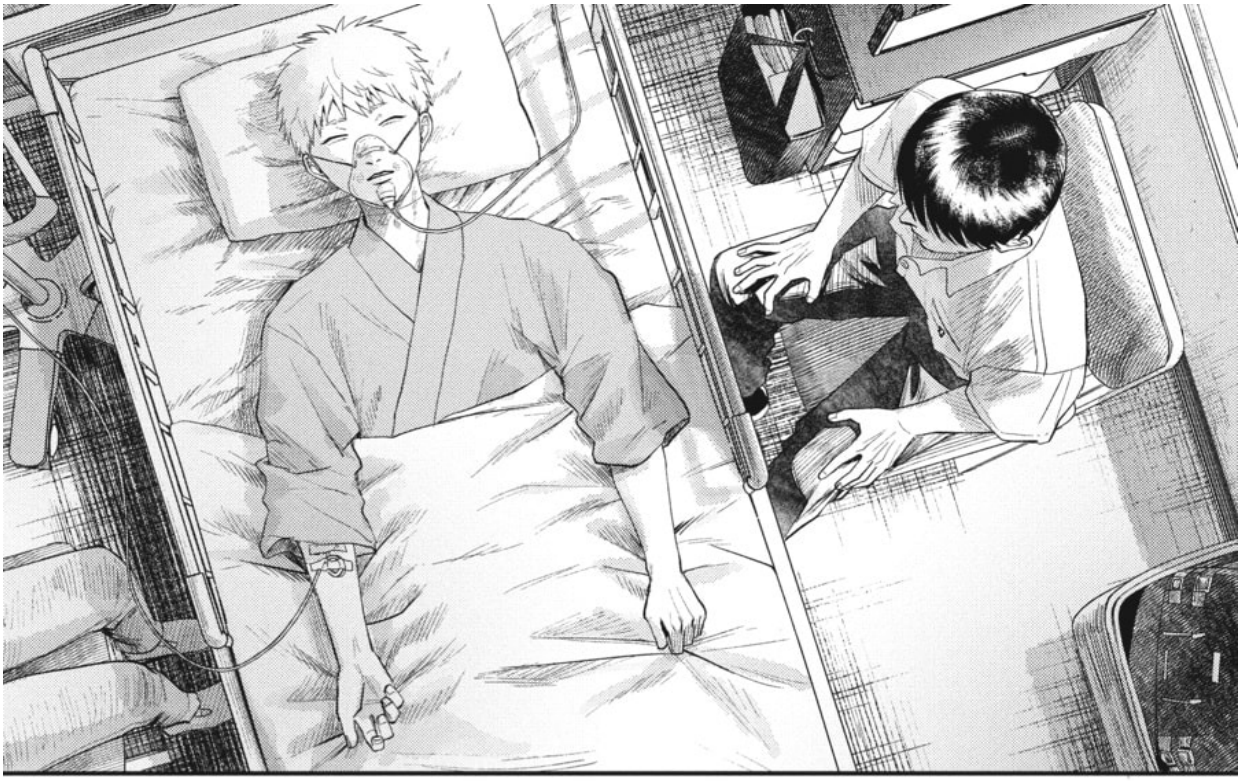
...
I SEE... WELL, IF I'M BEIN' HONEST...
...IT'S A RELIEF FOR ME AN' THE MISSUS... WRONG AS IT IS TO SAY THAT.
BY THE WAY...
...HAVE YOU SEEN...
...MY SUN-GLASS-ES?
.....
THEY'RE RIGHT'N FRONT A'YA...
HOLD ON...
SPLISH
20 21
25 26

ARE YA ACTUALLY BLIND?
YEAH ...
SURE AM.
SINCE WHEN?
...SINCE WAY BACK WHEN. WE GOOD HERE?
AND I CAN SEE WELL ENOUGH WITH THESE SUNGLASSES.
BUT IT'S A TYPE OF CURSE.
MEDICAL EXAMS DON'T SHOW ANYTHING WRONG WITH ME.
IT'S ANNOYING THAT THEY'RE COMPANY ISSUED, THOUGH.

WAIT.
WHAT EXACTLY ARE YA TRYIN' TO DO OUT HERE?
YOU SEE, MY "COMPANY" IS LOOKING FOR A CERTAIN THING FROM THE OTHER SIDE.
MY JOB.
SO THEY LOOK FOR PLACES WITH EVEN THE SLIGHTEST POSSIBILITY OF HAVING WHAT THEY'RE AFTER AND SEND EMPLOYEES LIKE ME TO INVESTIGATE.
THEY'VE BEEN RESEARCHING IT FOR CENTURIES...
THAT'S HOW VALUABLE IT IS.

I DON'T KNOW MUCH 'BOUT THAT COMPANY OF YOURS!!
BUT I RECKON THERE'S A REASON YOU'VE GONE OUTTA YER WAY FOR ALL THIS.
NOT THAT.
I MEANT PERSON-ALLY.
HA HA!
YOU'RE SHARPER THAN YOU LOOK.
DROP
"NOUNUKI-SAMA."
I INTEND TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT THING. MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT THAT.
SINCE, AT THE VERY LEAST...
...I'M ON HUMANITY'S SIDE.
...I JUST HAVE A LITTLE MORE ON MY PLATE NOW.

WHAT ABOUT DEALIN' WITH NOU-NUKI-SAMA !!?
AND WHAT IF WE'RE ATTACKED BY IMPURITIES AGAIN...?
HUH!? HEY!
...SO I'LL LET YOU TAKE CARE OF THINGS.
I'VE GOTTA LEAVE THE VILLAGE FOR A BIT...
LIKE I CAN—
THEN FIGHT 'EM OFF WITH THAT SWORD! YOU'RE A SIXTH DAN IN KENDO, RIGHT?
Missed Call
Satou



HOW LONG'S HIKARU-KUN BEEN OUT FOR?
TESTS SHOW NOTHIN' WRONG, RIGHT?

SO...YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THAT MAN EITHER, DO YOU?

IT'S BEEN TWO DAYS.
IT PROBABLY... TAKES TIME WHEN THE DAMAGE IS LIFE-THREATENING.

NAW ...
BUT IT SURE IS ODD...
FROM THE LOOKS OF IT, THAT MAN CUT HIKARU-KUN TO CHECK IF HE WAS SUPERNATURAL...
IF HE IS, I RECKON SOMEONE IN KUBITACHI MUSTA HIRED 'IM.
COULD BE...A MEDIUM OR SOMETHIN'.
AND IF SO, I WOULDN'T BE NONE TOO SURPRISED IF WORD GETS 'ROUND 'BOUT HIKARU-KUN BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.
I WONDER WHAT THEIR AIM IS.
AND YET NO ONE'S TRIED NOTHIN' OVER THE PAST TWO DAYS.
DON'T THEY WANNA EXORCISE HIM?
HUH?
NAW! THERE AIN'T NO WAY!!
AH HA HA!
YA CAN'T EXORCISE SOMETHIN' LIKE HIM!

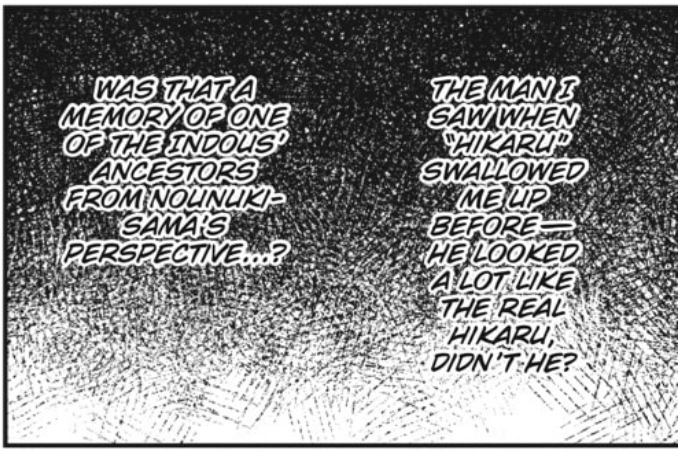
ALL A PERSON COULD DO IS PHYSICALLY TAKE HIM OUTTA THE VILLAGE...
...OR MAYBE LOCK 'IM UP SOME-WHERE?
HE'S PRETTY WEAK NOW, BUT NOT SO WEAK THAT A HUMAN COULD DO ANYTHIN' TO HIM.
BUT WHETHER THIS BOY COULD DO ANYTHIN' TO A HUMAN IS A WHOLE 'NOTHER STORY...
KEEP YER GUARD UP, AND IF THINGS GET DANGEROUS, YOU RUN RIGHT OVER TO MY PLACE.
I'LL TRY LOOKIN' INTO THAT MAN TOO.
LOOK INTO HIM...? HOW?
AH, I SEE...

SEERS HAVE THEIR OWN WAYS OF DOIN' THESE THINGS.
"JUST A HOUSEWIFE"...?
A MEDIUM, HUH...? OR IS IT THAT "COMPANY"...?
A man in his twenties has gone missing...
He was last seen at Daruma-zuka Tunnel in Kiboga-yama...

THE PATIENT NEXT TO US HAS HIS TV ON PRETTY LOUD...
This tunnel is famously known for being haunted...
...and the man, a Y-Tuber, posted on social media on the morning of the Xth...
...stating that he was going to Darumazuka and would upload a video if he made it back alive...
EVERYONE SAYS IT'S HAUNTED...
...BUT I HAVE NO IDEA WHY.
HEY, D'YOU KNOW HOW THE DARUMAZUKA TUNNEL BECAME HAUNTED?
WELL, THEY FOUND BONES HERE A LONG TIME AGO.
A WHOLE LOTTA THEM. THEY WERE OLD TOO.

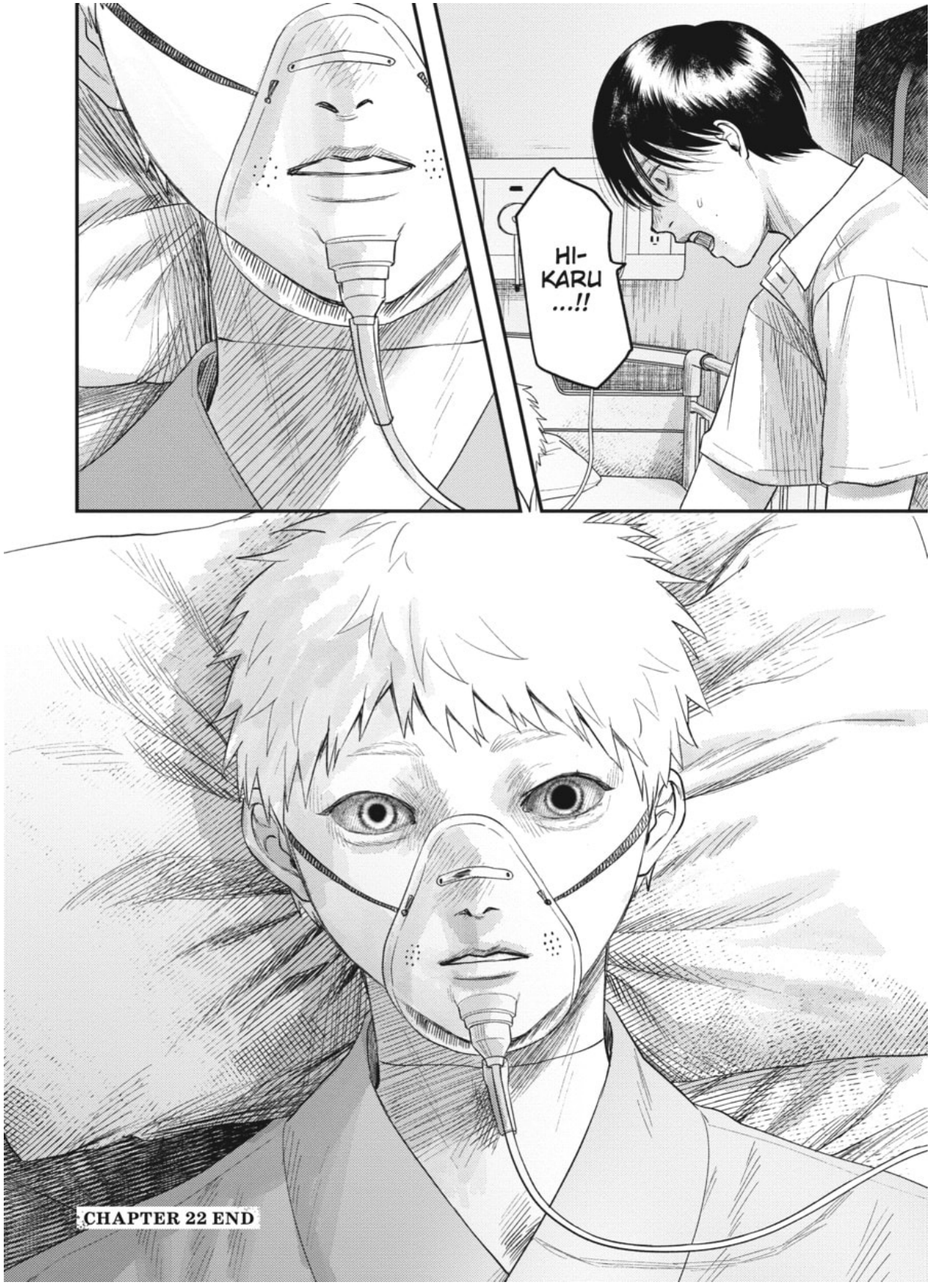
AND IN UDEKARI, THEY WERE JUST ARMS.
WHILE IN ASHIDORI, ALL THEY FOUND WERE LEGS.
THIS ALL HAPPENED BEFORE YOU WERE BORN, OF COURSE.
ODD THING WAS, ALL THE BONES WERE TORSOS.
THEY SAY THERE USED TO BE A CUSTOM OF BURYING THE VARIOUS BODY PARTS IN SEPARATE PLACES...
FOR REAL ...?
OH.
NO SKULLS...?
...BUT THE STRANGEST THING ABOUT IT ALL WAS THAT DESPITE FINDING ALL THEM BODIES...
...NOT A SINGLE SKULL WAS FOUND.

WAS THAT ITEM A HEAD?
"THE INDOUS' SIN"... "A GOD THAT GRANTS WISHES IN EXCHANGE FOR SOME SPECIFIC ITEM."


WAS THAT A MEMORY OF ONE OF THE INDOUS' ANCESTORS FROM NOUNUKI-SAMA'S PERSPECTIVE...?
THE MAN I SAW WHEN "HIKARU" SWALLOWED ME UP BEFORE— HE LOOKED A LOT LIKE THE REAL HIKARU, DIDN'T HE?

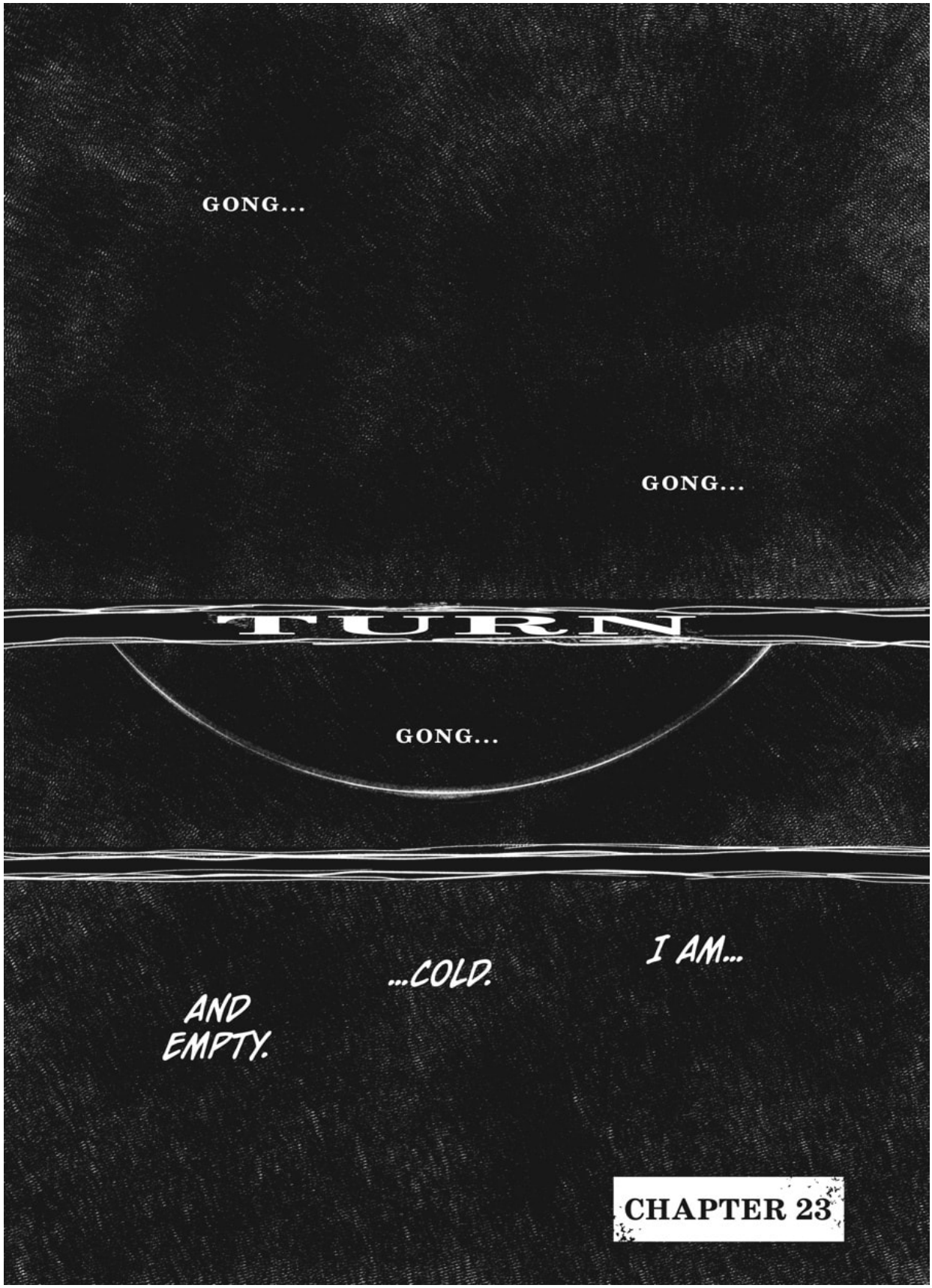
...THEY'VE ALL HAD SOMETHIN' WEIRD WITH THEM FROM THE NECK UP.
COME TO THINK OF IT, THE MONSTERS I'VE BEEN SEEIN'...

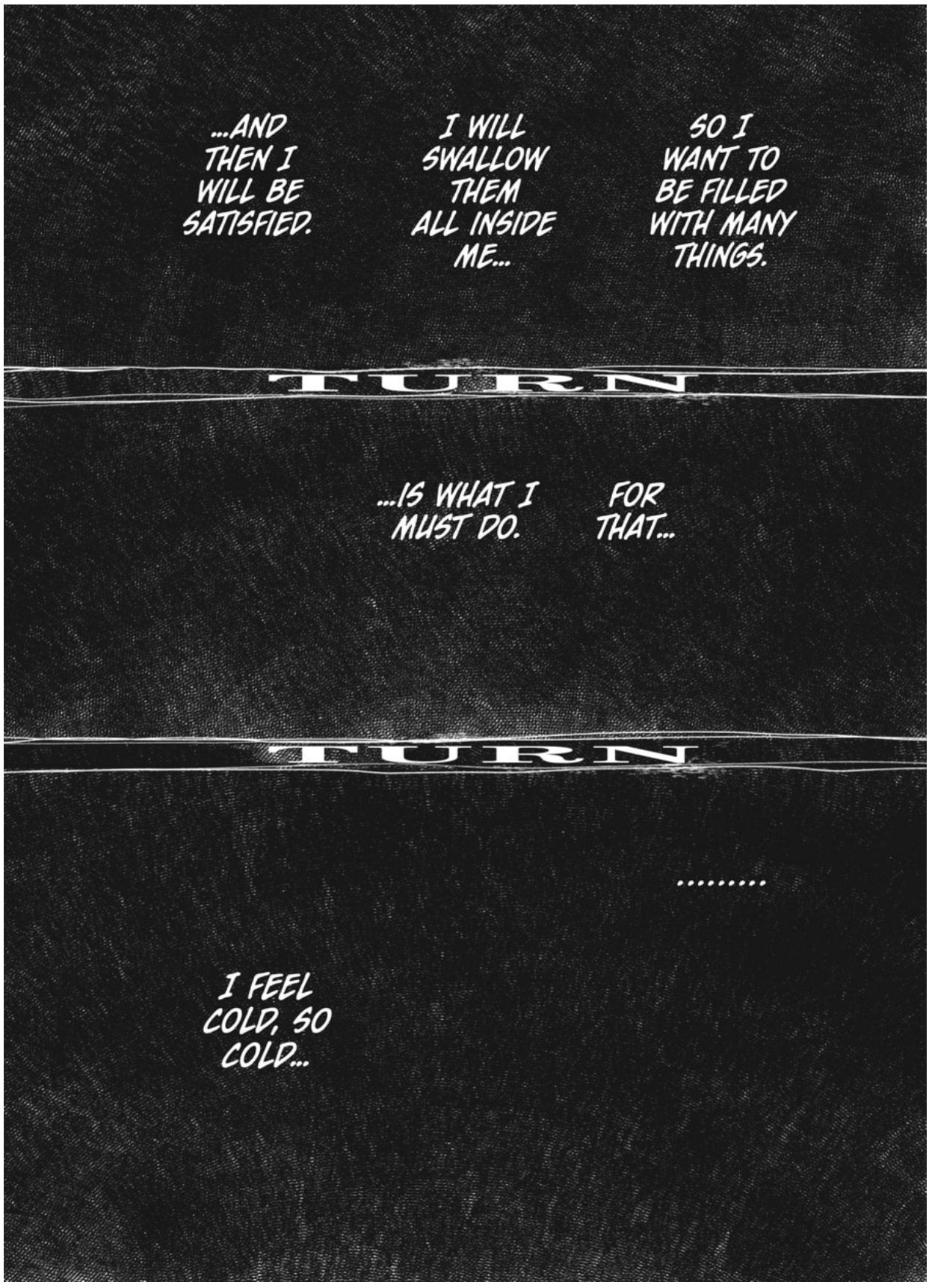
DID HEADS GO TO KUBITACHI...
...WHILE OTHER PARTS WERE BURIED ELSEWHERE?
IS THAT WHAT LED TO THE MASS DEATHS?
THE MAN I SAW OFFERED UP A HEAD AND ASKED NOUNUKI-SAMA FOR SOMETHIN'.
.....
HIKARU-KUN'S AWAKE...!
AH!
TSUJI-NAKA-KUN!

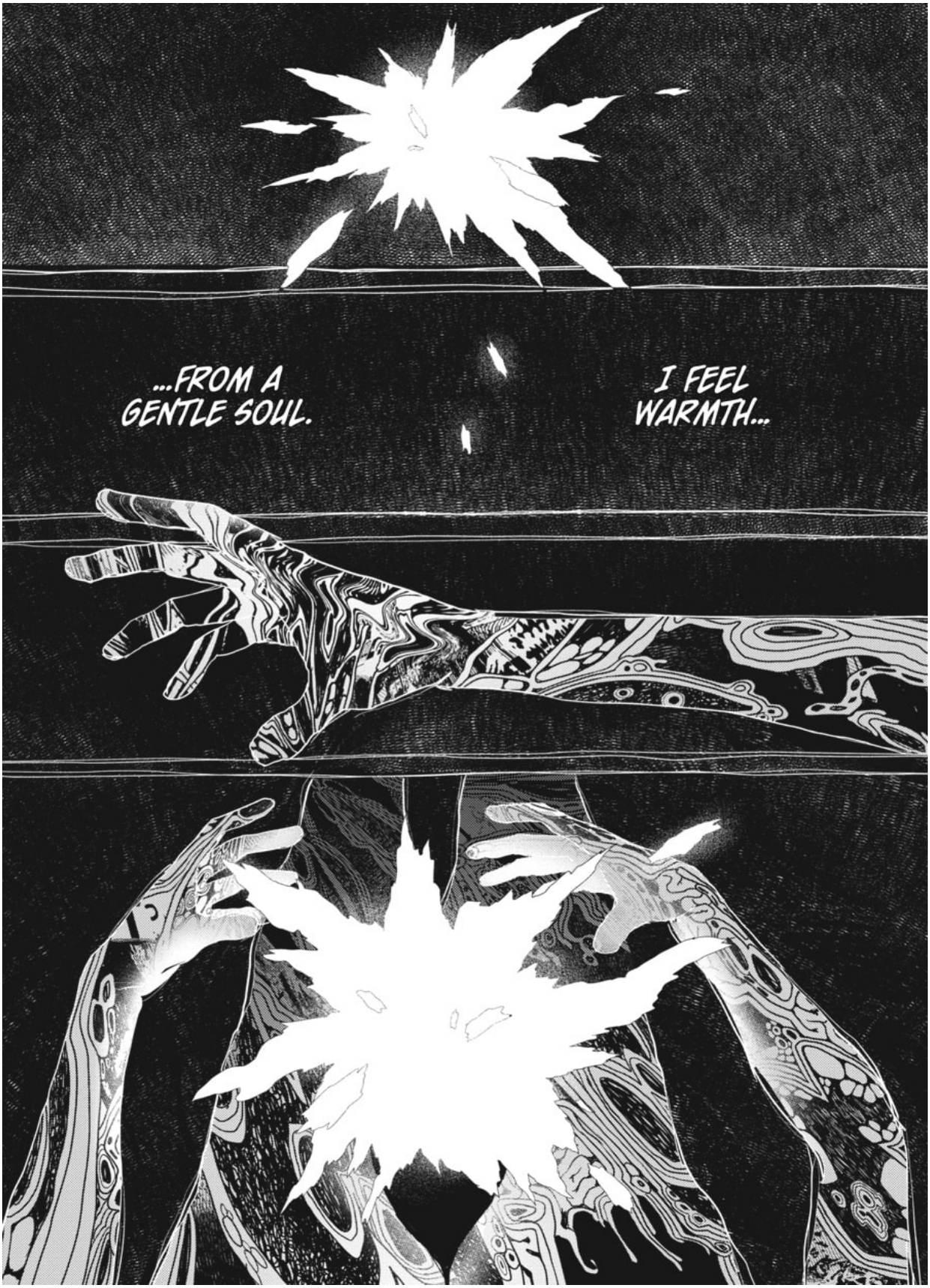

HI-
KARU
...!!
CHAPTER 22 END

IF HIKARU'S HEAD WOULDN'T STICK BACK ON AND STARTED TO SPEAK...
WHAT IF I GOT A JOB IN A HAUNTED HOUSE?
.....!

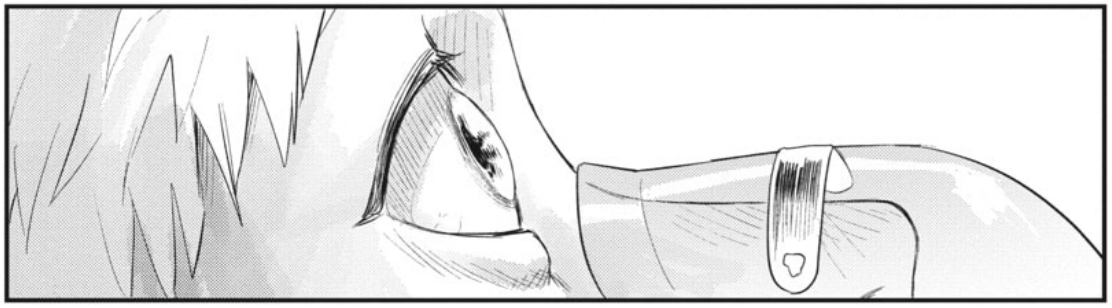
AT THIS POINT...
I'M HARDLY
SURPRISED
BY ANYTHING
ANYMORE.


GONG...
GONG...
TURN
GONG...
I AM...
...COLD.
AND EMPTY.
CHAPTER 23


...AND THEN I WILL BE SATISFIED.
I WILL SWALLOW THEM ALL INSIDE ME...
SO I WANT TO BE FILLED WITH MANY THINGS.
TURN
...IS WHAT I MUST DO.
FOR THAT...
TURN
.....
I FEEL COLD, SO COLD...


...FROM A GENTLE SOUL.
I FEEL WARMTH...

.....
HIKARU?



KWEEEN
WHUH...

HEY!!!!!!!!!!!!!
CLAP
AH!
...CAN YA...
...SAY YER NAME?
HUFF...
HUFF...

HUH?
HIKARU.
...HIKARU INDOU.
WHAT... WAS I JUS' DOIN'...?
YER BACK.
THANK GOODNESS...

HFF...
HAAH...
YO-SHIKI ...
...
...I'M GLAD YER AWAKE.
HMM...SO I WAS OUT FOR OVER TWO DAYS, HUH?
OW...!
I THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T FEEL PAIN...

HI-KARU-KUN...
I AIN'T S'POSED TO, BUT I HAVE LATELY...JUST A LITTLE.
YER AWFUL WEAK NOW, AIN'TCHA?
THOUGHT SO SINCE THE FIRST TIME I MET YA, BUT YER MUCH SMALLER THAN THE PRESENCE I FELT FROM THE MOUNTAIN...
YER REAL UNSTABLE, Y'KNOW.
SOMETHIN' ABOUT YA MUSTA CHANGED...

CHANGED...
NAW, THAT AIN'T TRUE... QUIT SAYIN' THAT STUFF.
...IT'S MY FAULT.
IS IT WHY I COULDN'T BEAT THAT IMPURITY AT THE DINER AND WHY I GOT MY HEAD CUT OFF?
SO IS THAT WHY I'VE BEEN FEELIN' PAIN?

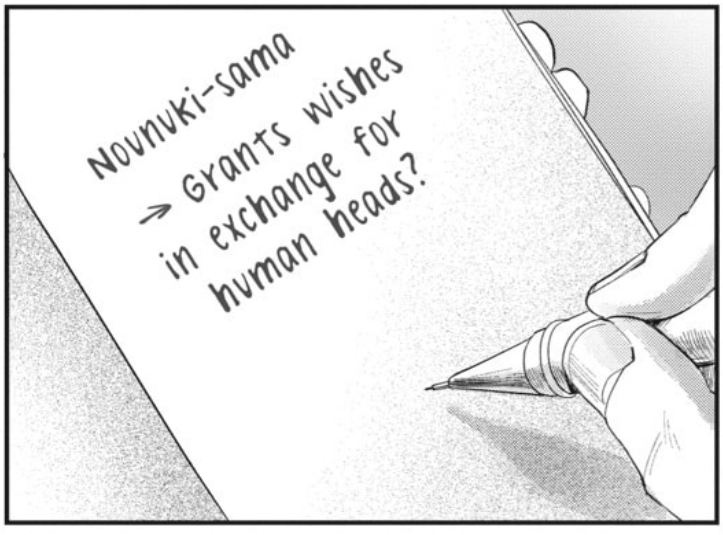
...OH, THAT GUY! THE SWORD THAT DUDE WITH THE SUNGLASSES CUT ME WITH...
THAT WEREN'T NO REGULAR SWORD...
AND ON TOP OF ALL THAT... I'VE BEEN FEELIN' KINDA STRANGE LATELY...
...HE MUST KNOW A LOT 'BOUT THINGS LIKE THAT. THAT'S FER SURE.
THERE'S SOMETHIN' SPECIAL ABOUT IT.
THAT FELLA MUSTA KNOWN THAT WHEN HE ATTACKED ME.
I'M A FOOL FOR NOT NOTICIN' EARLIER...!

WHAT IF HE ATTACKS US AGAIN...?
THEN WE'LL RUN AWAY!!
AND IF HE CUTS MY HEAD OFF AGAIN, YOU'LL STICK IT BACK ON!
BUT IT'S PROBABLY EASIER TO TAKE MY HEAD OFF NOW. HA-HA!
GUH-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!

BUT...THIS WON'T DO. I'M STARTIN' TO FEEL FOR 'IM TOO...
THIS BOY REALLY IS DANGEROUS.
MURMUR
MURMUR
MURMUR

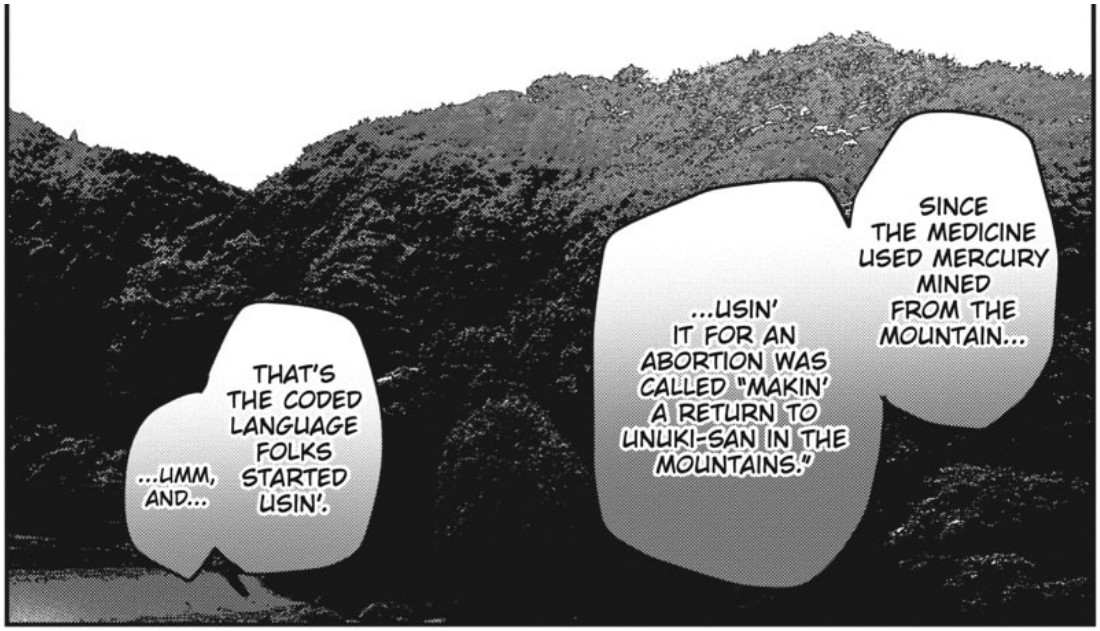
HE WAS ALL LIKE, "IT'S BORIN' WITHOUT HIKARU AROUND." SAID IT ABOUT TEN TIMES.
HUH?
I'M SOOO GLAD YER OKAY!
I DID NOT!
YOU'D NEVER GUESS IT, BUT MAKI WAS THE MOST WORRIED. CUTE, RIGHT?

HEY, WHATCHA BEEN WRITIN' ALL THIS TIME?


Novnuki-sama
→ Grants wishes in exchange for human heads?

SHUT
パタン
NOTHIN' SPECIAL.
DOIN' RESEARCH ON UNUKI-SAN?
HUH?
WHAT'D... YOU JUST...?
HEH HEH.
I'LL TELL YA ALL ABOUT IT.
IT'S A CODE NAME PEOPLE USED TO USE...
...WAY BACK WHEN.

A LONG TIME AGO, THIS AREA SUFFERED FROM A BUNCHA EPIDEMICS, LOUSY HARVESTS, AN' ACCIDENTS FOR NO APPARENT REASON.
DESPITE ALL THAT, THE REGION DID WELL ENOUGH FOR ITSELF.
APPARENTLY 'COS YA COULD MINE MERCURY 'ROUND THESE PARTS.
BUT OVER THE YEARS THERE WAS LESS AND LESS OF IT TO MINE...
...AND SEEIN' AS IT WAS HARD JUST TO SURVIVE, FOLKS TURNED TO ABORTIN' THEIR CHILDREN.
AND THEY USED MERCURY TO MAKE A MEDICINE FOR THAT.
IT WAS AN ABORTION DRUG—ONE ONLY FOUND 'ROUND HERE.
PRETTY SURE THEY CALLED IT "URONUKI MEDICINE"...
...WHICH APPARENTLY MEANT "BABY-KILLIN' MEDICINE."


SINCE THE MEDICINE USED MERCURY MINED FROM THE MOUNTAIN...
...USIN' IT FOR AN ABORTION WAS CALLED "MAKIN' A RETURN TO UNUKI-SAN IN THE MOUNTAINS."
THAT'S THE CODED LANGUAGE FOLKS STARTED USIN'.
...UMM, AND...

...BEFORE LONG, THEY STARTED WORSHIPPIN' UNUKI-SAN AS A MOUNTAIN GOD...
...AND AFTERWARD, THE EPIDEMICS AN' ALL THAT MYSTERIOUSLY CALMED DOWN.

...

MERCURY... IS THAT WHERE THE NAME OF THAT OFF-LIMITS AREA, NISAYAMA, CAME FROM?

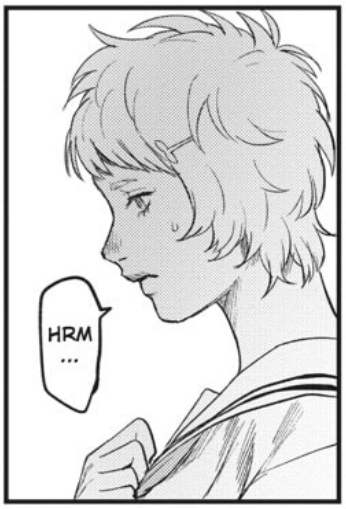
I DON'T 'MEMBER MUCH, BUT WAS I IN THAT MOUNTAIN BACK THEN...?
OH WOW. SOUNDS REAL CURIOUS.
MAYBE UNUKI-SAN'S TO BLAME FOR HIKARU GOIN' MISSIN' IN NISAYAMA TOO.
WHAT? AIN'T NO WAY A GOD LIKE THAT EXISTS.
THAT GOD COULD BE CLOSER TO US THAN Y'ALL THINK, Y'KNOW? OOOH, SPOOKY!
WHAT IF IT WERE?

LIKE IF IT TOOK SOMEONE'S PLACE OR SOMETHIN'.
WHAT WOULD Y'ALL DO IF IT REALLY WERE CLOSE BY?

...HUH?
I'D BE ABLE TO TELL RIGHT AWAY.
THEN I'D BE LIKE, "GIT ON BACK TO THE MOUNTAIN!!" AND SEND THAT THING PACKIN'!

WHA?

IT'S SCARY TO IMAGINE...
...BUT WHEN THAT SORTA THING HAPPENS, THEY USUALLY END UP EXPOSIN' THEMSELVES AND GOIN' BACK TO WHERE THEY CAME FROM, RIGHT?

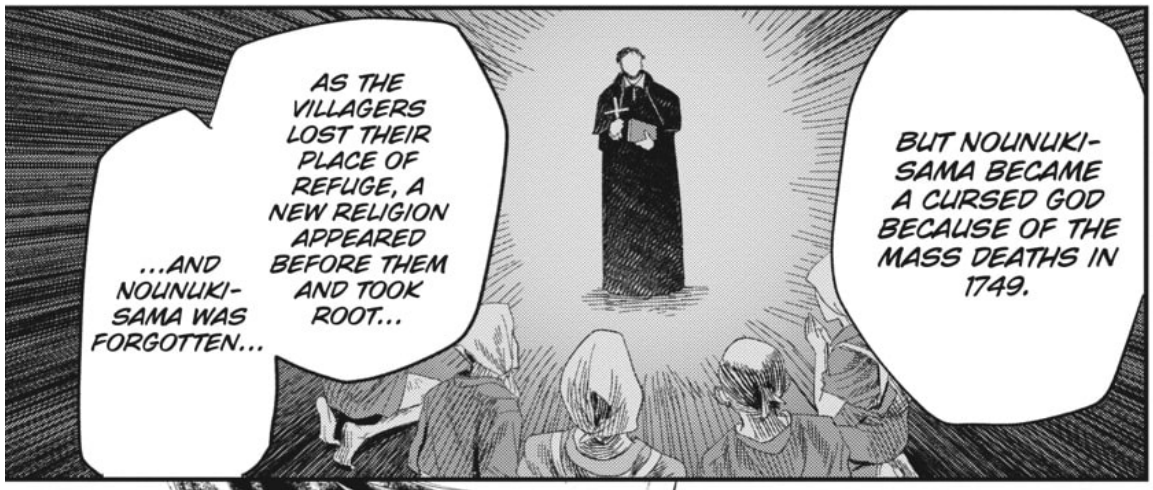

HRM...

...OH...
WAIT, MAKI...
HOW DO YA KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT ALL THAT?
URONUKI-SAMA, UNUKI-SAN, THEN NEXT IS... NOUNUKI-SAMA?
OH? 'COS MY BIG BROTHER'S REALLY INTO OCCULT STUFF.
HE'S STUDYIN' FOLKLORE AT A UNIVERSITY IN TOKYO RIGHT NOW.
I WANNA KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO UNUKI-SAN AFTER THAT.
YA MIND SENDIN' HIM A MINE MESSAGE TO ASK HIM SOME THINGS?

12:42
Aniki
NAAN A PROBLEM
MY BROTHER'S ALWAYS QUICK TO REPLY.
HE WROTE BACK.
UMM...
HE SAYS, "WHEN THE VILLAGE SPLIT UP (AROUND 1700), THE CULT OF UNUKI-SAN WAS LONG GONE.
"BUT FOR SOME REASON, THERE WERE RUMORS THROUGHOUT THE DOMAIN THAT INTERVENING IN THE REGION WOULD GET YOU CURSED.
"AND BECAUSE THE DOMAIN LARGELY LEFT THE REGION ALONE, THE PERSECUTED FOLLOWERS OF ANOTHER RELIGION FLED THEIR HOMES AND SETTLED HERE.
"THAT RELIGION THEN TOOK ROOT HERE, WHICH IS WHY KIBOGAYAMA HAS SO MANY CHURCHES TO THIS DAY."
...APPAR-ENTLY.

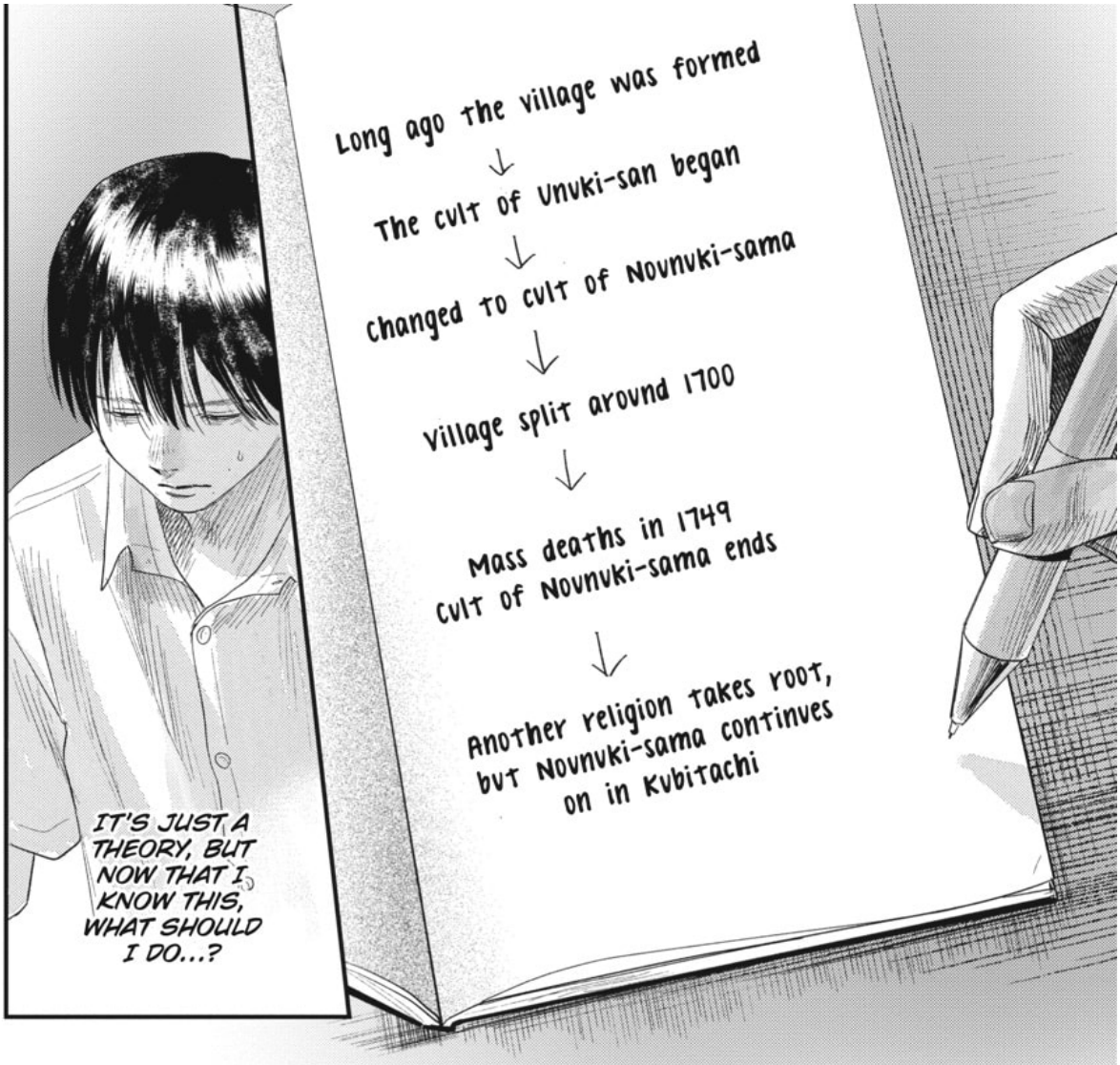
THAT'S WHAT HE SAID.
Y'ALL SURE ARE CURIOUS 'BOUT THIS STUFF, THOUGH. ARE YA INTO THE OCCULT TOO!?
YEAH... SURE AM.
IS THAT REALLY SO?
THE CULT WAS LOST?
URONUKI
UNUKI
NOUNUKI
NAME CHANGES ARE PRETTY COMMON.
IF IT DID CHANGE NAMES, IT COULD'VE GONE LIKE...
BUT NO ONE WAS OFFERING HEADS TO UNUKI-SAN.
DID IT CHANGE TO THE CULT OF NOUNUKI-SAMA AT SOME POINT, AND THAT'S WHEN THEY STARTED OFFERING HEADS?
MAYBE IT WASN'T LOST. MAYBE IT TRANSFORMED INSTEAD.

THE VILLAGE SPLITTING UP MAY ALSO BE RELATED TO THAT.
THEN THE CULT CONTINUED IN SECRET...

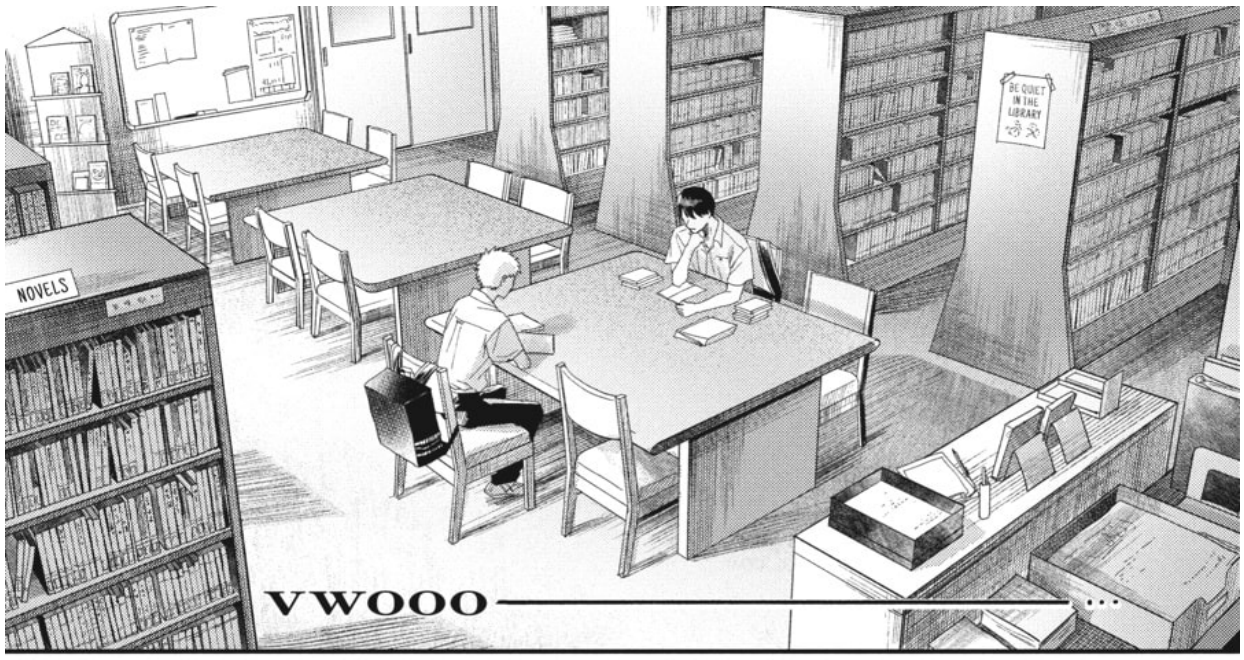

...AND NOUNUKI-SAMA WAS FORGOTTEN...
AS THE VILLAGERS LOST THEIR PLACE OF REFUGE, A NEW RELIGION APPEARED BEFORE THEM AND TOOK ROOT...
BUT NOUNUKI-SAMA BECAME A CURSED GOD BECAUSE OF THE MASS DEATHS IN 1749.

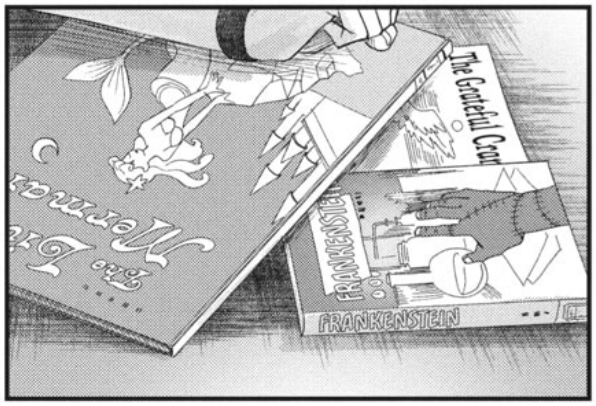
BUT IF THAT'S TRUE, THEN WHY'S THE CULT OF NOUNUKI-SAMA ONLY ACTIVE IN KUBITACHI?

TAKOYAKI
¥300
COME TO THINK OF IT, THERE'RE BARELY ANY FAMILIES IN KUBITACHI PRACTICIN' THAT RELIGION.
MR. KAMEYAMA'S FAMILY ORIGINALLY MOVED HERE FROM KIBOGAYAMA.
IS IT BECAUSE THE INDOUS HAD TO SETTLE SOME SORT OF DEBT...?
THE OTHER VILLAGES WERE FREED FROM NOUNUKI-SAMA, BUT KUBITACHI WASN'T.
SKRITCH


Long ago the village was formed
↓
The cult of Unuki-san began
↓
changed to cult of Nounuki-sama
↓
Village split around 1700
↓
Mass deaths in 1749
Cult of Nounuki-sama ends
↓
Another religion takes root, but Nounuki-sama continues on in Kubitachi
IT'S JUST A THEORY, BUT NOW THAT I KNOW THIS, WHAT SHOULD I DO...?

HEY, YOSHIKI...


NOVELS
BE QUIET IN THE LIBRARY
VWOOO


The Grateful Crow
FRANKENSTEIN

...WHERE'D I LEAVE OFF AGAIN?

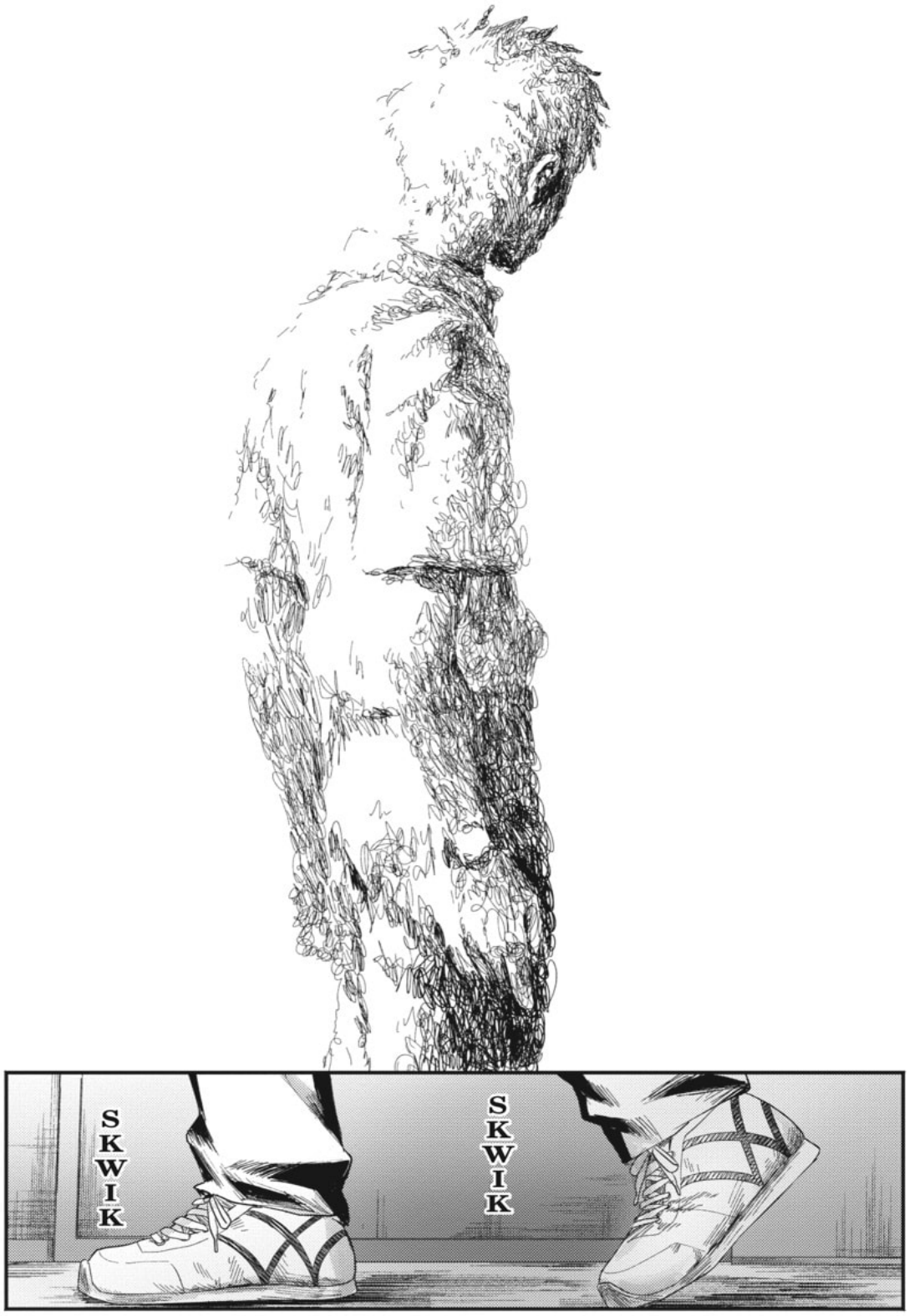
EVERYONE'S GONE NOW.

PRETTY MUCH...
...'ROUND THE PART WHERE YOU WERE SAYIN' I STARTED OUT AS "UNUKI-SAN."
NOW THAT YA MENTION IT, THAT'S THE NAME MY DADDY AND GRANDPA USED...
THEN UNUKI-SAN AND NOUNUKI-SAMA BEIN' THE SAME SEEMS TO MAKE SENSE.
SO ARE THE INDOUS THE ONLY ONES WHO USE THE OLD NAME?
I'M DUMB, SO I DUNNO MUCH...
...BUT I WONDER HOW MUCH THAT FELLA WITH THE SUNGLASSES KNOWS.
SPEAKIN' OF, HE STILL AIN'T DONE ANYTHIN', HAS HE?
1D ROLL
3D... ROLL
FEELS LIKE THAT'S WHERE WE'LL FIND THE INDOUS' SECRET.
BEFORE ANYTHIN' HAPPENS...
...WE OUGHTTA LOOK INTO THE SHRINE OLD MAN TAKEDA MENTIONED.

I DON'T WANNA THINK ABOUT IT...
RETURN BOOKS HERE
WHAT HAPPENED TO OLD MAN TAKEDA AFTER ALL THAT ANYWAY?
.....
IS THE REASON YER WEAK 'COS YOU'VE BEEN SPLIT IN HALF?
RETURN BOOKS HERE

THEN I'M GIVIN' THIS BACK.
TAKE IT.
...YEAH, PROLLY.
WORST CASE, MIGHT NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN.
EVEN IF I TAKE IT BACK, WHO KNOWS IF I'LL GO BACK TO NORMAL?
...I WON'T STAB YA.
PLUS...
...IF I TAKE THAT BACK, YA MIGHT STAB ME AGAIN, RIGHT?

SOMETHIN' ABOUT YA MUSTA CHANGED...
THROB
ズキ
THROB
THROB
THROB
THROB THROB
THROB


SKWIK
SKWIK

SKWIK
SKWIK
SKWIK
SO IS YER NECK BETTER NOW?
IT STILL HURTS, DON'T IT?
SKWIK
SKWIK

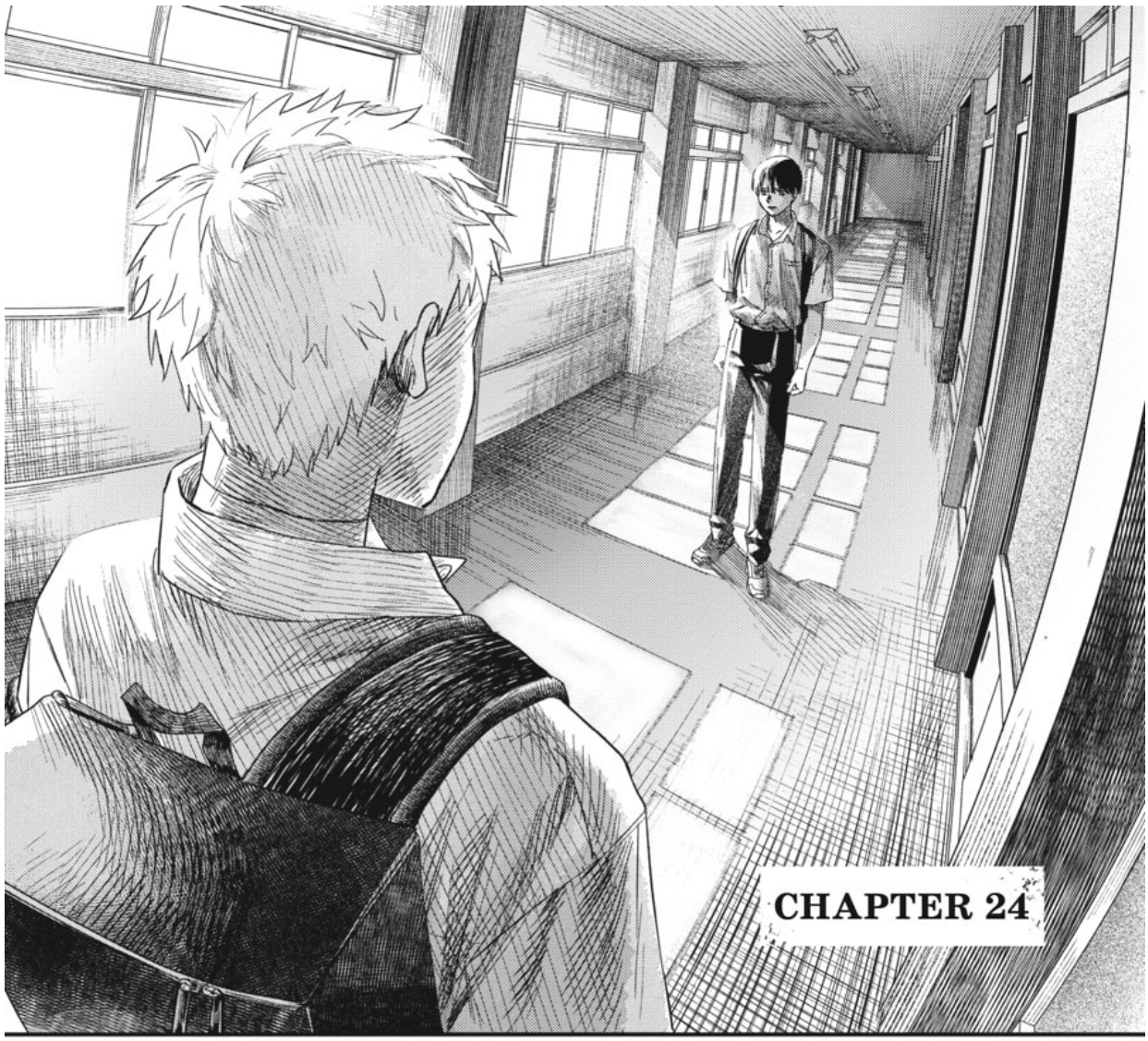
NAW. IT AIN'T THAT.
WHAT ...?

HERE

SPLK
CHAPTER 23 END

FOR A MOMENT, I WAS FIXIN' TO SLAP SOME SENSE INTO 'IM, BUT...THAT'D BE TOO MUCH... RIGHT?
SLAP
HEY!

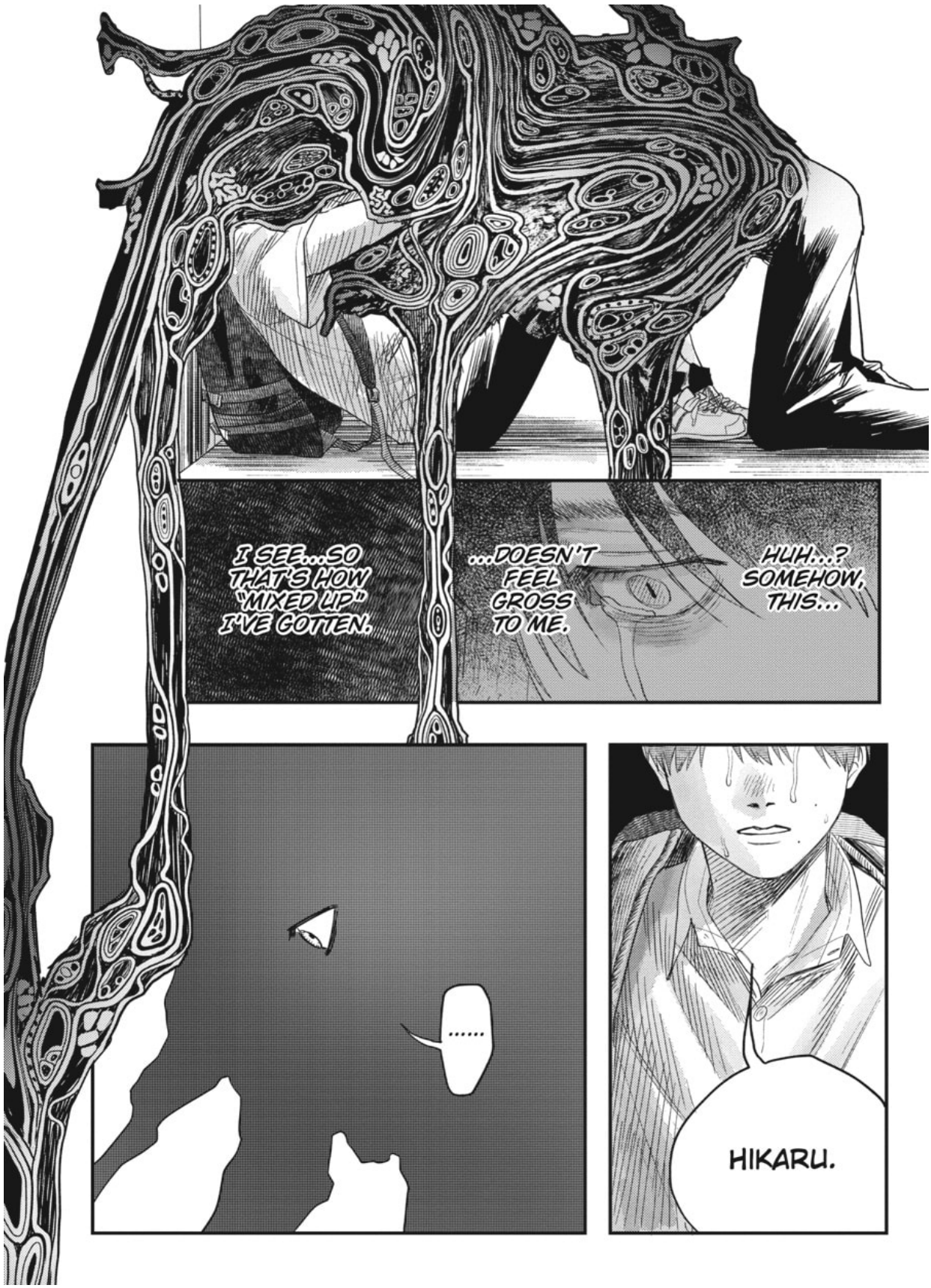
SO IN THIS ERA... AND IF SO, THEN IT'S CONSISTENT WITH... MUMBLE, MUMBLE...
YER PRETTY SMART, YOSHIKI. SHOULD I BE THINKIN' SOMETHIN' UP TOO?
MUMBLE, MUMBLE, MUMBLE, MUMBLE, MUMBLE, MUMBLE, MMBL...
...


CHAPTER 24

HUH?
AH.
AH!
OH, THIS IS ONE OF THOSE TIMES WHEN I GOTTA RUN.
STEP
STEP
STEP
DASH

SQWIK SQWIK
HFF!
HAH!
I'LL GO DOWN THOSE STAIRS, AND...
TMP
TMP
FOR REAL?
COME ON OUT
THERE'RE PEOPLE DOWN THERE. IF SOMEONE SEES HIKARU, THEN...

...YEAH... ALL THIS TIME, THE FACT THAT HE LOOKS LIKE HIKARU SPARED ME...
I'M GONNA DI—
I'M SCARED.
CHATTER
CHATTER


I SEE...SO THAT'S HOW "MIXED UP" I'VE GOTTEN.
...DOESN'T FEEL GROSS TO ME.
HUH...? SOMEHOW, THIS...
.....
HIKARU.

...
ННН?
ННН?
ТМР
.....
.....

AK CROAK CROAK CROAK
CROAK CROAK CROAK
KREE REE
CROAK CROAK CROAK CROAK CROAK CROAK CROAK CROAK
KREE REE

LOOKS LIKE IT'S BEEN MAIN-TAINED TOO...
...
THE SHRINE... REALLY EXISTS...
HEY.
ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TODAY...
D'YOU KNOW HOW MANY TIMES YOU'VE TRIED TO KILL ME ALREADY?
IT'S NOTHIN' TO ME AT THIS POINT.

'ERE.
MY GRANDPA SLEEPS EARLY, SO I SNUCK IT OFF 'IM.
HE'S BLUFFIN'.
GOT THE KEY TO THE SHRINE?
'SIDES, I STABBED YOU TOO, SO WE'RE EVEN, RIGHT?
I CAN'T GET HUNG UP ON EVERY LITTLE THING LIKE THAT.
CREAK
IT WORKS.

IT'S PITCH-BLACK IN THERE. CAN'T SEE A THING.
HIKARU, THE FLASH-LIGHT.
OH RIGHT.
FLASH

WAH!
WHAT THE—!?
HUMAN HEADS!?

WHY... ARE THESE THINGS HERE...?
SHRF
YER TOUCH-IN' 'EM!?
NAW... LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE ACTUALLY MADE OF WOOD.
UGH!
SOME-THIN'...
...HURTS ...!
KW-EE EEN
WHY'RE THERE SO MANY OF 'EM?
DADDY, WHAT ARE... ...THESE FACES?

MATSUSHIMA SAW MILL
YA SCARED?
NAW, NOT REALLY... I'M NEARLY THROUGH WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, Y'KNOW?
LOTTA BAD THINGS BEEN HAPPENIN' TO THIS LAND SINCE WAY BACK WHEN.
AN' 'COS OF THAT, FOLKS 'ROUND HERE WERE ESPECIALLY POOR AND HAD IT REAL TOUGH.
THEY'RE "OKUBI-SAMA"— HEADS THAT WERE OFFERED UP TO UNUKI-SAMA.

...ASKIN' FOR GOOD HARVESTS AN' TO WARD OFF DISEASE AN' SUCH...
THAT'S WHY THEY OFFERED UP THEM HEADS TO UNUKI-SAMA AND MADE ALL SORTSA WISHES...
SO WE CARVE REPLACEMENTS AND ENSHRINE 'EM HERE.
WHEN THEY MADE THEIR OFFERINGS, THEM HEADS WOULD DISAPPEAR RIGHT ON THE SPOT.
OH WOW...
WE'VE BEEN TAKIN' CARE OF THIS SHRINE—OR "DOU," AS IT'S CALLED—FOR GENERATIONS, AN' THAT'S WHY WE'RE THE "INDOUS."
THAT'S RIGHT.
SO ALL THESE HEADS BELONG TO DEAD PEOPLE?

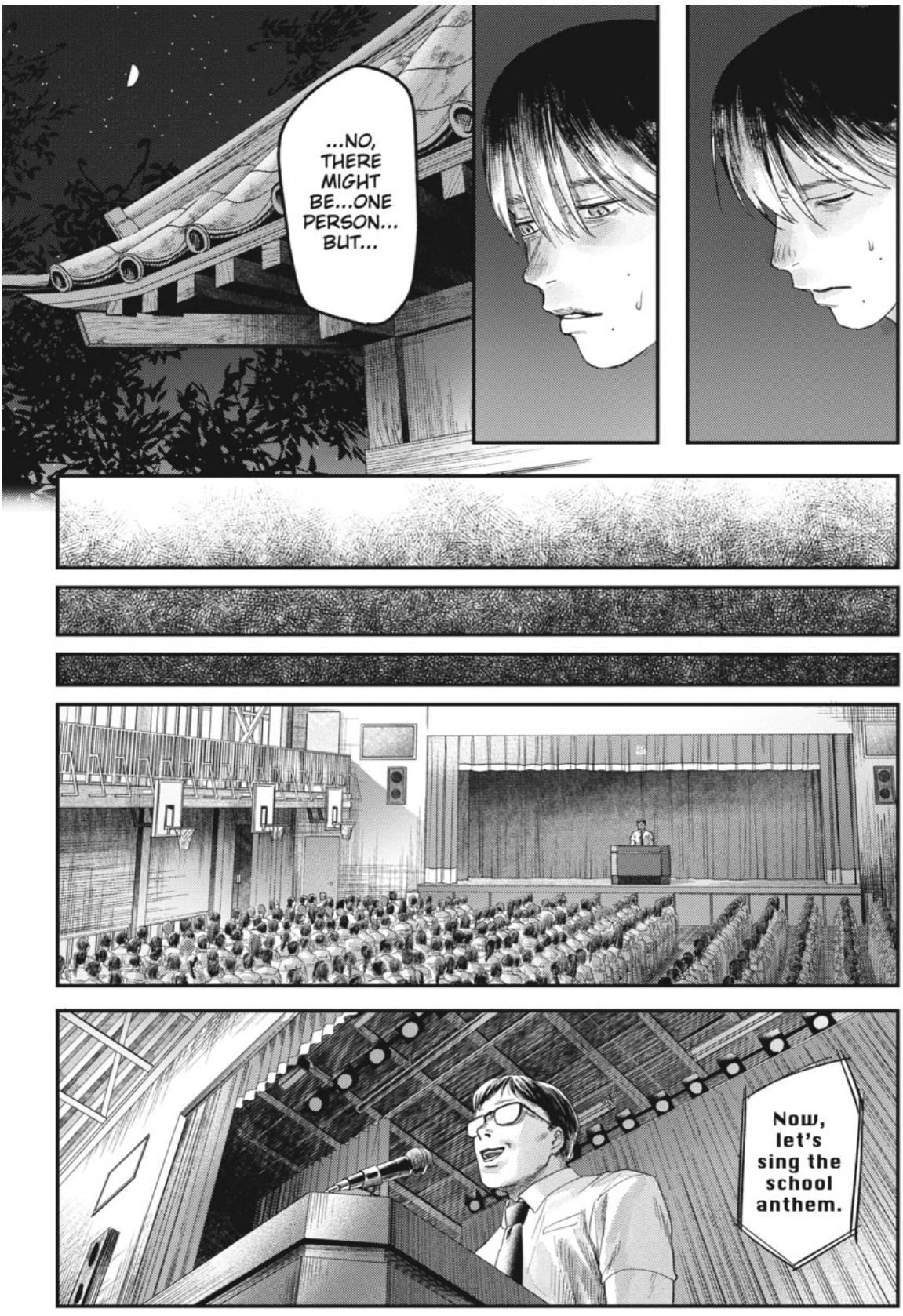
THE REST OF THE BODY HAS TO BE BURIED AS FAR AWAY FROM THE HEAD AS POSSIBLE.
TO MAKE THAT EASY, THE VILLAGE GOT SPLIT UP INTO FIVE PARTS.
FUNNY, AIN'T IT?
THEN, BY CHANCE, THE PIECES ENDED UP TAKIN' THE SHAPE OF A HUMAN.
...NO ONE REALLY KNOWS TO THIS DAY.
BEATS ME.
WHY FOLKS HAD TO BURY THEM PARTS SO FAR FROM EACH OTHER IN THE FIRST PLACE...
WHY? IT'S CREEPY...

.....
WHOSE HEADS ARE THESE ANYWAY?
FOLKS WHO WERE SICK AN' DIDN'T HAVE LONG TO LIVE, LIKE ELDERS AN' SUCH...THEY OFTEN...
...OFFERED UP THEIR OWN HEADS.
BUT...
...YOU KNOW THAT SMALL SHRINE AT THE EDGE OF THE VILLAGE?
THAT WAS MADE WHEN A TRAVELIN' MONK WAS FORCED TO BECOME AN OFFERING.
FOLKS MADE IT AFTER 'COS THEY WERE AFRAID OF BEIN' CURSED.

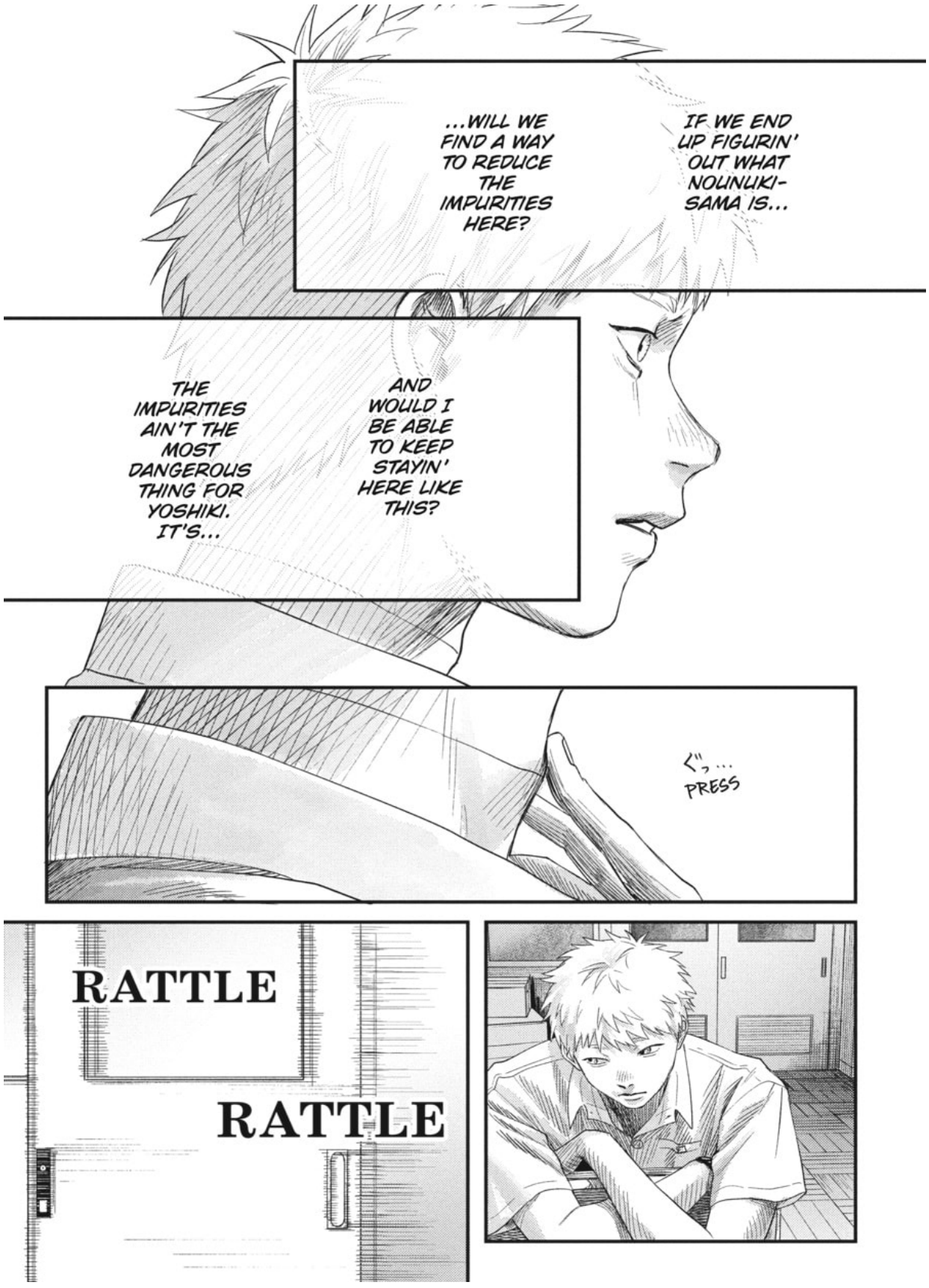
...SO THEY MURDERED PEOPLE?
...THEY SURE DID.
NOT JUST THAT MONK NEITHER. THEY KILLED SCORES OF OTHERS AN' TURNED 'EM INTO HEADS.
LOTTA INNOCENT PEOPLE. ALL DONE QUIETLY.
HIKARU.
THAT'S THE VILLAGE'S SIN.
MATSUSHIMA SAW MILL
YOU CAN'T EVER FORGET THAT, Y'HEAR?
AND...
...THAT GOES FOR THE INDOU FAMILY'S SIN AS WELL...

TMP
.....
...DID YOU...
"HICHI-SAN" USED TO BE IN HERE.
COURSE IT'S GONE...
...YEAH.
...REMEMBER SOMETHIN'?

I DON'T NEED HEADS OR NOTHIN' TO GRANT WISHES, THOUGH.
SO WHY DO ALL THAT?
COURSE THEY'D... HIDE THAT...
...HA HA.
...SO THE VILLAGE WAS JUST FULL OF MURDERERS?
...CAN'T RECALL... THAT PART'S STILL PRETTY FUZZY.
SO WHAT EXACTLY WAS THE INDOUS' SIN ANYWAY...?
...NOT SURE THERE'S ANYONE ELSE WHO WAS CLOSE TO HIKARU'S DADDY AND MIGHT KNOW MORE...


...NO, THERE MIGHT BE...ONE PERSON... BUT...
Now, let's sing the school anthem.

...MOUN-
TAINS,
MOUNT
TEN-
BAAAN
...
SOARING
HIIIGH,
ABOVE
THE
BLUUUE
...
HONESTLY,
IT SEEMS
PRETTY
FITTING...
BUT IT
KINDA MAKES
SENSE.
SOUNDS
LIKE LOTSA
LIVES WERE
OFFERED UP
TO ME.


...WILL WE FIND A WAY TO REDUCE THE IMPURITIES HERE?
IF WE END UP FIGURIN' OUT WHAT NOUNUKI-SAMA IS...
THE IMPURITIES AIN'T THE MOST DANGEROUS THING FOR YOSHIKI. IT'S...
AND WOULD I BE ABLE TO KEEP STAYIN' HERE LIKE THIS?
ぐっ…
PRESS
RATTLE
RATTLE

...SNEAKY, AREN'T YA? SKIPPIN' THE CEREMONY.
THEY'LL LET IT GO, LONG AS I SAY I WAS TAKIN' A DUMP.
SUMMER BREAK'S TOMOR-ROW, HUH?
SURE IS.
YA GONNA DO THE HOME-WORK?
I'LL GET IT DONE IN THE FIRST WEEK.
YUU-CHAN ALWAYS DOES IT THROUGH TEARS ON THE LAST DAY OF BREAK. HA-HA!

HA HA!
STUDYIN'S FUN.
RECKON I SHOULD DO IT TOO.
...
YA REALLY AIN'T HIKARU, HUH?
HM?
UM, SO...
I SAW YA ON THE SECOND FLOOR LANDIN' BEFORE.

ボリ SCRATCH SCRATCH ボリ
.....
AW, DANG ...
ASAKO...
...THERE YA GO AGAIN.
YOU KNOW YOU SHOULDN'T GO SAYIN' THAT STUFF TO ME DIRECTLY...
IT'S DOWN-RIGHT DUMB.
YEAH.
YA GONNA TELL?
I WON'T. NOT A WORD.
NOT TO NO ONE.
IT'S SCARY AN' STRANGE TO KNOW Y'AINT THE REAL HIKARU.
AN' YOSHIKI ACTIN' LIKE NOTHIN'S CHANGED IS ALSO... STRANGE.
I CAN'T DO THAT...
IT'S ALL JUS' ...
...SO STRANGE ...

OH.
OH YEAH, THAT...
EVEN AFTER I MESSED UP YER RIGHT EAR?
AN' THAT I WON'T KILL NO ONE ELSE...
SORRY 'BOUT THAT.
I PROMISED YOSHIKI I WON'T DO NOTHIN' TO YOU NO MORE.
I CAN'T BRING MYSELF TO HATE YA AS THIS "HIKARU" AT ALL.
BUT Y'KNOW WHAT?
NO.
...THIS BODY'S JUST A CORPSE.
HEY.
IS THE REAL HIKARU ALIVE OUT THERE SOMEWHERE?
AH HA HA...
YA REALLY AIN'T HUMAN, ARE YA?

I SEE.
SNIFF!
I SORT OF...
...FIG-URED...
UNH!
UNNNGH...
ゴシ
ゴシ
RUB
RUB
NGH...
UAAAAH...

AN' 'COS I'M HERE, NO ONE'LL MOURN LIKE HER.
THE REAL HIKARU SHOULDA BEEN MOURNED LIKE THIS.
AH. RIGHT.
SORRY.
...BUT IF I WEREN'T HERE, YOSHIKI WOULD PROLLY BE MOURNIN' WITH EVERYONE ELSE, AND HE'D BE SUFFERIN' LESS THAN HE IS NOW.
THAT'S WHAT HIKARU WISHED FOR...
...AND ENJOY THEM-SELVES...
...THINK ABOUT COLLEGE AN' SUCH...
THEN MAYBE THEY'D BE ABLE TO MOVE ON WITH THEIR LIVES...

BZZH BZZH
AH!
BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH
RMBL RMBL RMBL RMBL
BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH
BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH
HEY.
LOOKS LIKE RAIN. LET'S HURRY ON HOME.
...HEY, SO...
THE HARDBALL TEAM IS HEADING TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP!
FLAP FLAP
WHAT KINDA GUY WAS HIKARU?
YER ASKIN' ME THAT NOW?

ゴロゴロゴロ...
RMBL RMBL RMBL
WELL, HIKARU WAS...
WHAT KINDA GUY WAS HE?
HIKARU INDOU WAS LIKE THE MAIN CHARACTER IN A MANGA.

HE WAS A FAST RUNNER AND BAD AT SCHOOL.
HE COULD EASILY STRIKE UP CONVERSATION WITH ANYONE.
HE WASN'T ESPECIALLY POLITE, THOUGH, SO HE HAD A HARD TIME WITH OLDER STUDENTS.
BUT YOUNGER STUDENTS LOVED HIM.
WHEN THERE WERE RUMORS THAT A GIRL LIKED HIM...
...HE'D GET ALL NERVOUS ABOUT WHEN SHE MIGHT CONFESS...
...BUT THEN SHE'D USUALLY START GOIN' OUT WITH SOME OTHER GUY.
BEFORE HE DIED, HE WAS SWEET ON SAITOU-SAN FROM CLASS B...
...AND SAID IT WAS BECAUSE SHE LOOKED LIKE LIN XIANG FROM MASTER + MASTER.

HE WASN'T PICKY WITH FOOD. IF IT WAS EDIBLE, HE'D EAT IT.
HE USUALLY FELL ASLEEP DURING MOVIES.
HE WAS ALWAYS STRONG. HE DIDN'T WORRY LIKE ME.
I NEVER SAW HIM CRY BEFORE.
AN' HE DIDN'T CRY.
BUT I WONDER IF HE REALLY WANTED TO.

...COURSE I DO.
DO YOU MISS HIKARU?
HUH?
SORRY, YOSHIKI. GO ON WITHOUT ME.
YEAH ...
WHY?
NO REASON! I'LL HEAD HOME IN JUST A BIT!
RMBL RMBL RMBL

F-SH
IT'S BEEN YEARS SINCE I INITIATED A CONVERSATION WITH HIM.
HAAAAH...
KNOCK
KNOCK
BUT IF ANYONE KNOWS ABOUT THE INDOUS... IT'S HIM.

...HEY, DAD?
ガチャ…
GCHAK
YO-SHIKI.
FSH

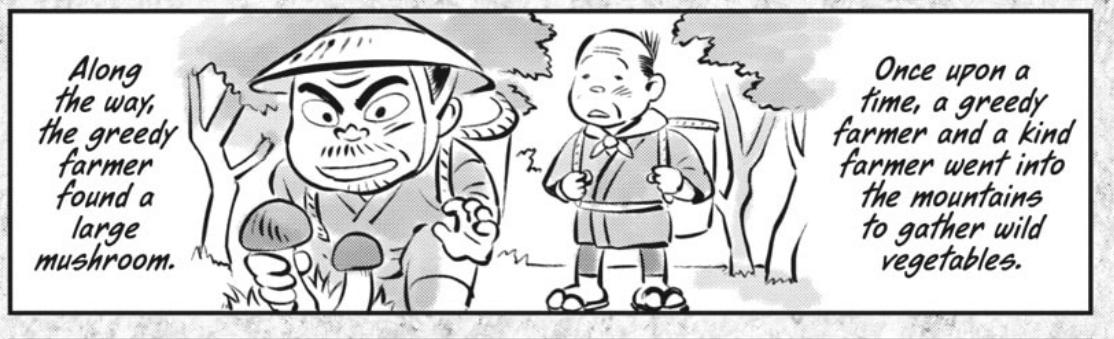
DING-DONG
WHO COULD THAT BE IN THIS RAIN?
Satu-rated soil has been cited as...
SHIRT: LIVE FOR DANCE CLUB
GCHAK
HI
HOLD ON. I'M COMIN'.

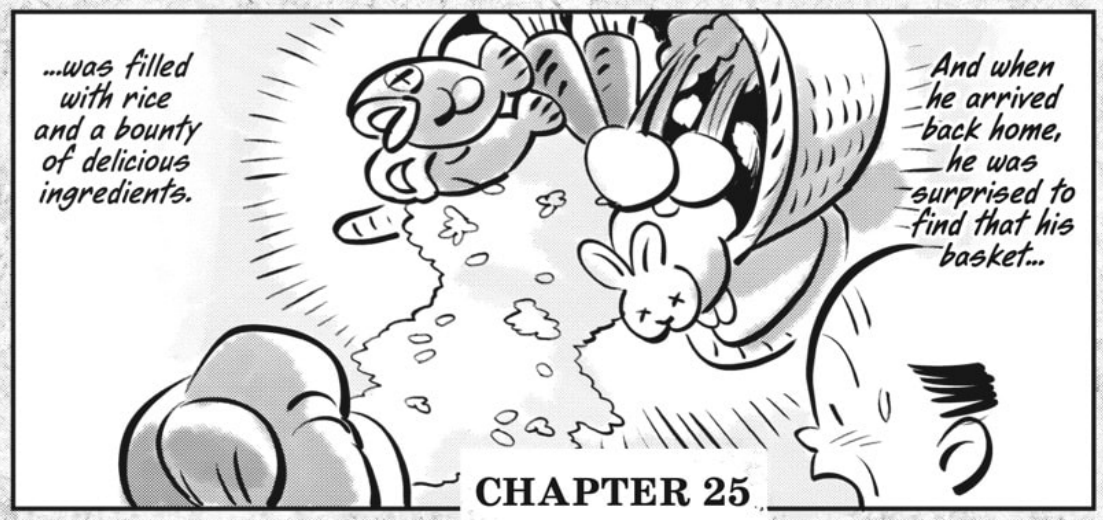
CHAPTER 24 END

IF HIKARU HADN'T SPLIT HIMSELF IN HALF, YOSHIKI WOULD PROBABLY BE DEAD.

I'M GONNA TURN INTO A WATERMELON MAN...
NO, ON SECOND THOUGHT, MAYBE HIKARU DID CRY SOMETIMES WHEN WE WERE LITTLE...
WHEN HIKARU CRIED, YOSHIKI USUALLY CRIED EVEN MORE, SO HE DOESN'T REALLY REMEMBER HIKARU CRYING.

THE TALE OF THE FARMER'S HEAD





CHAPTER 25

"IT TURNS OUT THAT HOLE WAS THE MOUTH OF A HUNGRY GOD...
"...AND SINCE THE GOD'S HUNGER HAD BEEN SATISFIED, IT REWARDED THE FARMER.
"AND THE FARMER LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER."
BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH
SHUT
BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH
WHAT KINDA STORY IS THAT...?
BZZH BZZH BZZH B
I AIN'T SO SURE MYSELF.

FSH
……
……

FSH
...HOW'S SCHOOL THESE DAYS?
...ALL RIGHT, I GUESS.
I SEE.
WELL...
I WANNA ASK YOU ABOUT HIKARU'S DADDY...
IS THERE... SOMETHIN' ON YER MIND...?
WHAT ABOUT 'IM...?
WHAT'D THE INDOUS DO YEARS AN' YEARS AGO?
WHAT WAS THEIR "SIN"...?

FSH
I FOUND OUT...ON MY OWN.
'COS IT'S SOMETHING I NEED TO KNOW NOW.
WHO TOLD YA ABOUT THAT?
WHY'S THAT?
.....
...
THAT'S WHAT WE DISCUSSED, BUT...
...DIDN'T WANNA BURDEN OUR SONS WITH THIS MESS...
...KOUHEI AND I...

ABOUT EVERY FIVE YEARS, A MALE MEMBER OF THE INDOU FAMILY GOES TO THAT MOUNTAIN...
...TO "APOLOGIZE"... AND TO ASK THE GOD NOT TO LEAVE THE MOUNTAIN.
'COS THE INDOUS DID SOMETHING...
...WHEN THE MASS DEATHS HAPPENED A LONG TIME AGO...
.....
ONE TIME I ASKED KOUHEI...
...WHAT THE INDOUS HAD DONE.
...After the bubble burst... the clubs in Ginza...
THE REASON FOLKS HATE THE INDOUS, HUH?

OKAY ...
SO THE YOUNG MASTER WENT INTO THE MOUNTAIN TO OFFER HER UP.
WELL, Y'SEE, IT'S ALL 'COS THE YOUNG MASTER OF THE INDOU HOUSEHOLD BACK THEN...
...HAD A WIFE WHO FELL ILL IN AN EPIDEMIC AND WAS TURNED INTO A HEAD FOR OFFERIN'.
AN' WHAT D'YOU THINK HE WISHED FOR?
"TAKE ANY OTHER HEAD YA LIKE, LONG AS IT'S NOT FROM ONE OF THE INDOUS!"
HE GOES, "BRING MY WIFE BACK TO LIFE!"
HA HA!
AN' AFTER THAT...
AH...
DANG.
THAT'S, UH...

WHAT!?
NO WAY.
AND IN EXCHANGE...
...SHE CAME RIGHT BACK TO LIFE!!
...BEFORE THE END OF THAT DAY, ONE-THIRD OF THE VILLAGE HAD DIED MYSTERI-OUSLY.
HANG-INGS.
FOLKS CUTTIN' OFF THEIR FAMILY'S HEADS AN' THEN KILLIN' THEM-SELVES.
HEADS GETTING TRAMPLED BY HORSES.
SOME PEOPLE EVEN JUST TURNED 'ROUND AN' SAW FOLKS WITH NO HEADS.
YEP!
COURSE, THERE WERE NO DEATHS FOR THE INDOUS.
UH... GEEZ.
S'ALL ABOUT HEADS...

...STAYED ALIVE AS A HEAD...
...BUT LIVIN' THAT WAY CAUSED HER TERRIBLE SUFFERIN', AN' SHE DIED LATER THAT NIGHT.
AN' THE WIFE WHO CAME BACK TO LIFE...
THEN THE MYSTERIOUS DEATHS STOPPED...
...AND— STRANGER STILL— THE VILLAGE HAD BUMPER CROPS AND FEWER EPIDEMICS AFTER THAT.
TO BE FAIR, MY ANCESTORS WERE PRETTY UNLUCKY...
I HEARD THAT UNTIL THEN, NO MATTER HOW MANY HEADS THEY OFFERED UP...
...NOTHIN' REALLY EVER HAPPENED...

WHAT !?
HER NAME'S HICHI INDOU.
...SO THE INDOUS GOTTA KEEP GOIN' TO THE MOUNTAIN.
WHO KNOWS?
BUT THAT WIFE'S HEAD IS STILL AROUND...
HOW MUCH OF THAT IS EVEN TRUE?
...SAYIN' STUFF LIKE THAT WITHOUT BATTIN' AN EYE.
YA DON'T THINK IT'S PRETTY OUT THERE...?
YER ALWAYS...
WAY I HEAR IT, EVEN WHEN WE RETURN HER TO THE MOUNTAIN, SHE SOMEHOW ALWAYS COMES BACK TO US.
...AND SOMETHIN' WE GOTTA TELL OUR KIDS ABOUT...
NAW, IT'S NOT THAT...
IT'S JUST A BURDEN I GOTTA CARRY...

YUKI-CHAN AGAIN?
THAT'S RIGHT!!
THAT'S WHY I WANNA GET HITCHED WITH YUKI-NEE ALREADY!!
'COS OF WHAT HAPPENED WITH THE INDOUS WAY BACK.
THEY'RE ALWAYS TELLIN' US, "IF YA GOT SOMEONE SPECIAL, YA GOTTA MARRY 'EM QUICK-LIKE AND MAKE 'EM AN INDOU."
I GOTTA PROTECT YUKI-NEE!
IF THEY'RE AN INDOU, THEY WON'T GET TAKEN AWAY BY AN ANGRY UNUKI-SAMA.
SHUT UP!
WHY'RE YA KEEPIN' TRACK OF THAT!?
SHE'S REJECTED YA ELEVEN TIMES NOW. YER SOME SORTA CREEP, AIN'T YA?

BEFORE HE DIED, KOUHEI HAD IT OUT WITH THE ELDERS 'COS HE SAID HE WANTED THE RITUAL TO END WITH HIM.
HE SAID, "UNUKI-SAMA AIN'T WHAT Y'ALL THINK IT IS. THE RITUAL'S POINTLESS."
THEN NEXT THING YA KNOW, HE DIED IN AN ACCIDENT.
GOTTA WONDER IF IT REALLY WAS AN ACCIDENT, THOUGH...
...HEY, DAD...
...WHAT WAS IT LIKE FOR YA WHEN HIKARU'S DADDY DIED?
...
ANYTHIN' THAT WAS GOOD ABOUT THIS VILLAGE DIED WITH HIM...
...IS WHAT IT FELT LIKE...

I HATE HOW WE'RE SO ALIKE...
YOSHIKI.
YER NOTHIN' LIKE ME.
YA GOT YER MOTHER'S STRENGTH AN' KINDNESS...
YOU'LL BE A BETTER PERSON THAN YER OLD MAN.
...TELL MOM THAT.
WHY DON'T YA EVER HAVE A REAL CONVERSATION WITH HER?

FEELS LIKE I MIGHT LOSE MY PLACE IN THIS HOUSE BEFORE LONG.
...I'M SCARED TO. YER MOM'S SO STRONG.
PEOPLE CLING TO THE THINGS THEY'VE BEEN MISSIN'.
THAT'S DUMB.
...IS HAVIN' A "PLACE" REALLY SO IMPORTANT?
FOLKS WHO CAN'T GET ENOUGH TO EAT BECOME GLUTTONS FOR FOOD.
FOLKS STARVED FOR LOVE CRAVE IT EXCESSIVELY.
AND FOLKS WHO GET ATTACHED TO A PLACE PROB'LY NEVER HAD A PLACE TO CALL THEIR OWN.
MAYBE IT'S THE SAME FOR HIKARU...
RECKON YER MOM AND I...
... OUGHTTA HAVE A PROPER TALK.

HEY, DAD?
...YA SURE GOT A LOTTA BOOKS.
OH, YEAH...
FEEL FREE TO READ 'EM IF YA LIKE.
...YEAH.
...THANKS.
HEY, MOM, YOSHIKI AN' DAD'RE TALKIN' TO EACH OTHER.

HE'S ALWAYS QUICK TO PUT ON A GOOD FACE WITH YOU KIDS.
HAAH...
HUH.
WHAT'S FOR DINNER TONIGHT?
GINGER PORK.
WAIT, THAT'S DAD'S FAVORITE, ISN'T IT...?
FISH

THNK
コト
Y'SEE, TSUJI-NAKA-KUN...
HE'S A MAJIRIMONO NOW.
JUST LIKE MY SON...

WHAT'S A MAJIRI-MONO?
IT'S A RARITY, BUT WHEN SOMETHIN' FROM THE OTHER SIDE INTERFERES WITH SOMEONE HERE...
...THAT PERSON'S SOUL CAN GET MIXED UP WITH ELEMENTS FROM THE OTHER SIDE.
ONCE THAT HAPPENS, THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN THEM AN' THE OTHER SIDE BLURS...
...AND IMPURITIES START FLOCKIN' TO THEM.
ONCE THOSE THINGS ARE IN REACH, THEY ONLY WANNA GET CLOSER.
I USED TO DO EVERYTHIN' I COULD TO PROTECT MY SON FROM 'EM, SINCE HE'S A MAJIRIMONO...
IF HE GETS ANY MORE MIXED UP THAN HE ALREADY IS...
...WILL IT BE BAD FOR YOSHIKI?

I DON'T EVEN WANNA IMAGINE THAT.
...TO BE HONEST, I DON'T HAVE A GOOD HANDLE ON HUMAN EMOTIONS.
I KNOW WHAT A SOUL IS, BUT I DON'T MUCH UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF A "LIFE."
HUMANS'RE COMPLICATED... WITH YER ROMANCE, AN' FRIENDSHIP, AN' LOVE FOR YER FAMILY AN' ALL...
I JUST CAN'T GET... WHAT ANY OF THOSE THINGS REALLY MEAN.
BUT YOSHIKI...
HE TOLD ME I DON'T GOTTA UNDERSTAND THOSE THINGS, AN' I DON'T NEED TO BE HUMAN.

BUT ME BEIN' HERE IS ONLY MAKIN' THINGS WORSE...
LATELY, I'VE HAD MOMENTS WHEN I CAN'T CONTROL MYSELF.
THAT'S WHY I...DON'T WANNA HURT YOSHIKI.
MAYBE YER INSTINCTIVELY INTERFERIN' WITH TSUJINAKA-KUN...
...LIKE SOME WEAKENED ANIMAL GOIN' BERSERK...
ALL 'COS I'M WEAK NOW?
...I'M GONNA LOSE TO THAT "INSTINCT" AN' TAKE YOSHIKI'S SOUL...
WELL... EITHER WAY, EVENTUALLY...

I RECKON THAT'S YER... NATURE.
IF ANYTHIN' GOES WRONG, HE'S POWERFUL ENOUGH TO DESTROY EVERYTHIN'.
THIS BOY'S TERRIFYIN'.
BUT HE SAYS HE WANTS TO STAY AND PROTECT HIS PLACE HERE.
IT'S NOT LIKE I DON'T HAVE ANY IDEAS ON HOW TO DEAL WITH HIM.
UM, SO...

...WOULD IT FIX EVERYTHIN' IF I WENT BACK TO THE MOUNTAIN?
FLINCH
ギク
.....
WOULD THERE BE FEWER IMPURITIES THEN?
FSH
WOULD EVERYONE BE SAFE... AND WOULD EVERYTHIN' GO BACK TO HOW IT WAS BEFORE?

TICK
TOCK
TICK
TOCK
BUT IT MIGHT MAKE THINGS A LITTLE BETTER...
A LID THAT DON'T FIT PERFECTLY IS STILL BETTER THAN NO LID AT ALL.
I...
...DON'T KNOW.
THERE MIGHT BE OTHER WAYS...
BUT IT AIN'T EXACTLY A SUREFIRE SOLUTION...

I'M A MONSTER, AFTER ALL. I CAN HANDLE IT...
.....
IT'S TOTALLY FINE.
.....
↓SNIFF↑
.....
↓SNIFF↑
WHY ...?
NNH ...
UUU ...
YO-SHIKI ...
UNH ...
...
THIS SUCKS ...
↓SNIFF↑
WHY ...?
NNH...
I DON'T WANNA BE ALONE.

FSH
ペラ…
FLIP
REGIONAL FOLKLORE
HOW TO WRITE SUSPENSE
HOW TO WRITE MYSTERIES
MOUNTAINSIDE ECOSYSTEMS
DEALING WITH CHILDREN
ADVICE FOR THE REBELLIOUS YEARS
THE HISTORY OF WAR
ANYTHING WILL DO. I JUST NEED SOME SORTA CLUE...
DOESN'T SEEM LIKE I'LL FIND ANYTHIN' USEFUL HERE.
TO SUMMARIZE ALL I'VE LEARNED SO FAR...
CLICK
hf

THE SIN COMMITTED BY THE INDOU HEIR...
...WAS SACRIFICING VILLAGERS OUTSIDE THEIR FAMILY TO BRING HIS WIFE BACK TO LIFE.
AS A RESULT, A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF PEOPLE DIED.
The cult of Unuki-san forms
↓
Changed to the cult of Nounuki-sama = Hikaru
◦ A local cult born from hardship
◦ God that grants wishes when offered heads
◦ Offered heads disappear, replacement heads are carved and enshrined in a doll-style shrine
◦ The village was split up to bury the dismembered body parts of sacrifices as far away as possible from each other
↓
"Mass death" incident (1749)
◦ Caused by an ancestor of the Indous
◦ Wish that went too far → wife's revival
◦ Afterward, the village became peaceful
◦ Since then, it's customary for Indou men to perform a ritual in the mountain using "Hichi-san"
BEIN' DEAD, BEIN' ALIVE...IS THERE REALLY THAT BIG A DIFFERENCE?
THAT WOULD SURELY HAVE THE VILLAGERS THINKIN' NOUNUKI-SAMA WAS A "CURSED GOD."
AN' THE TRUTH BEHIND THE MASS DEATHS IS THAT IT WASN'T A FAMINE BUT MYSTERIOUS DEATHS...

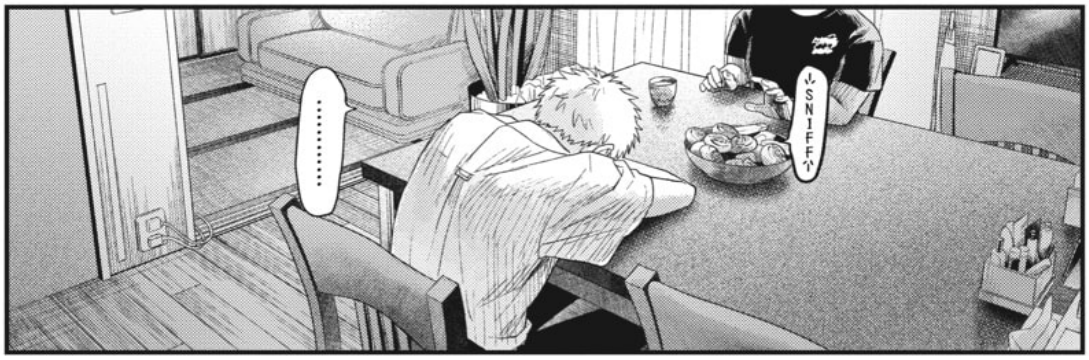
BUT IT'S WEIRD.
AFTER THAT, THE VILLAGE PROBABLY STABILIZED BECAUSE THERE WERE FEWER IMPURITIES...
...
WHILE NOUNUKI-SAMA, A.K.A. HIKARU, WAS IN THE MOUNTAIN, THE IMPURITIES SHOULD'VE GATHERED THERE, KEEPING THE VILLAGE SAFE.
WHAT WAS GOIN' ON BEFORE THE MASS DEATHS?
WHY DID A WISH GET GRANTED ONLY AT THAT TIME WHEN THE MASS DEATHS OCCURRED?
I'M ALSO CURIOUS ABOUT WHY, BEFORE THE MASS DEATHS OCCURRED...
...NOTHIN' HAD ACTUALLY HAPPENED NO MATTER HOW MANY HEADS THEY OFFERED UP.

I DON'T GET WHY THERE'RE SO MANY IMPURITIES 'ROUND THESE PARTS TO BEGIN WITH...
CREAK ギシ
HAAH ...
THAT'S THE ONE THING I CAN'T DEAL WITH.
THAT'S A NO-GO FOR ME.
I'M GOIN' BACK TO THE MOUNTAIN! HA-HA!
WELL, YOSHIKI!
WITHOUT KNOWING THE REASON FOR THAT, IN THE END...
THUD
THUD

THE ART OF RAFANELLI
19,200 YEN
AN ART BOOK...?
FLIP
"EMANUELE RAFANELLI. A PAINTER FROM THE RENAISSANCE ERA. DIED IN 1520."
THESE PAGES MUST BE HIS ROUGH SKETCHES.
THESE PAINTINGS ARE BEAUTIFUL...
GIRL WITH VEIL
FLIP
...HM?

「地獄のスケッチ」
A Sketch of Gehenna - 1519

THIS IS...



THIS IS TOO CRUEL FOR A CHILD LIKE HIM...IF HE COULD JUST STAY LIKE THIS A LITTLE LONGER...

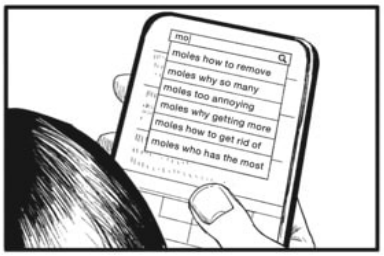
IT'S BARELY BEEN A YEAR SINCE HE WAS BORN INTO THIS WORLD.

...I MIGHT BE ABLE TO PEEL HIM AWAY FROM THIS BODY.
...IN HIS CURRENT STATE...
...I'LL JUST TAKE FULL RESPONSIBILITY...
...AND IF IT WOULD SPARE TSUJINAKA-KUN...
IF THIS BOY'S SUFFERING...
...AND TAKE CARE OF HIKARU-KUN...
CHAPTER 25 END

HIKARU'S FATHER
KOUHEI INDOU

YOSHIKI WAS MORE ATTACHED TO HIM THAN HIS OWN FATHER. HE WAS THE TYPE OF GUY WHO WOULD PLAY TAG WITH KIDS UNTIL THEY CRIED, AND HE WOULD PUT BOOGERS ON YOU IF HE CAUGHT YOU, SO YOSHIKI AND HIKARU WOULD RUN AWAY FROM HIM LIKE THEIR LIVES DEPENDED ON IT.

YOSHIKI TAKES AFTER HIS MOTHER MORE. BOTH HE AND HIS SISTER INHERITED THEIR MOLES FROM THEIR FATHER.



JUST GO HOME FOR NOW...

CHAPTER 26

TAKE CARE NOW.
GCHAK
ガチャン…
THANK YOU...FOR THE RAIN-COAT...
AT HIKARU'S HOUSE...THERE'S A FAMILY WHO KNOWS NOTHIN' ABOUT ALL THIS. I'M SURE THEY'RE PREPARIN' SUPPER AN' WAITIN' FOR HIM TO GET HOME LIKE THEY ALWAYS HAVE.

...I JUST CAN'T BRING MYSELF TO DO ALL THAT...
WHEN I THINK ABOUT TSUJINAKA-KUN'S OR HIKARU-KUN'S FAMILIES...
DING-DONG
MAYBE MY DAUGHTER'S BACK?
OOF.
GCHAK
COM-ING.
.....!!
...YER...

H BZZH
BZZH BZZH BZZH
BZZH BZZH BZZH
BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH B
BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH
BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH
BZZH
BZZH BZZH BZZH
BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH
BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZ

WELL, KAORU SAID IT WAS THE CUTEST ONE.
CREAK
CREAK
HEY.
WAS THAT FLOATIE REALLY THE BEST CHOICE?
IT AIN'T EVEN A PROPER RING.
CREAK
IT'S GREAT THAT KAORU'S BEEN GOIN' TO SCHOOL LATELY...
...AND MAKIN' FRIENDS TO GO TO THE POOL WITH.
BECAUSE YA BOUGHT ONE THAT'S ALREADY INFLATED.
JUST LET THE AIR OUT AN' FOLD IT UP.
BUT WHY'D I HAVE TO GO ALL THE WAY TO MION TO BUY A FLOATIE?
IT'S SUCH A HASSLE TO CARRY.

PFT!
GETTIN' ALL SENTI-MENTAL.
FOR THE GIANT SALAMAN-DER...
THAT'D BE KINDA SAD, WOULDN'T IT?
...SO ANYWAY, I'VE LEARNED A BUNCH OF OTHER STUFF.
LIKE ABOUT THE "SIN" OF THE INDOUS...
BZZH
...DON'T REMEMBER WHEN YOU WERE NOUNUKI-SAMA, DO YA?
YOU...

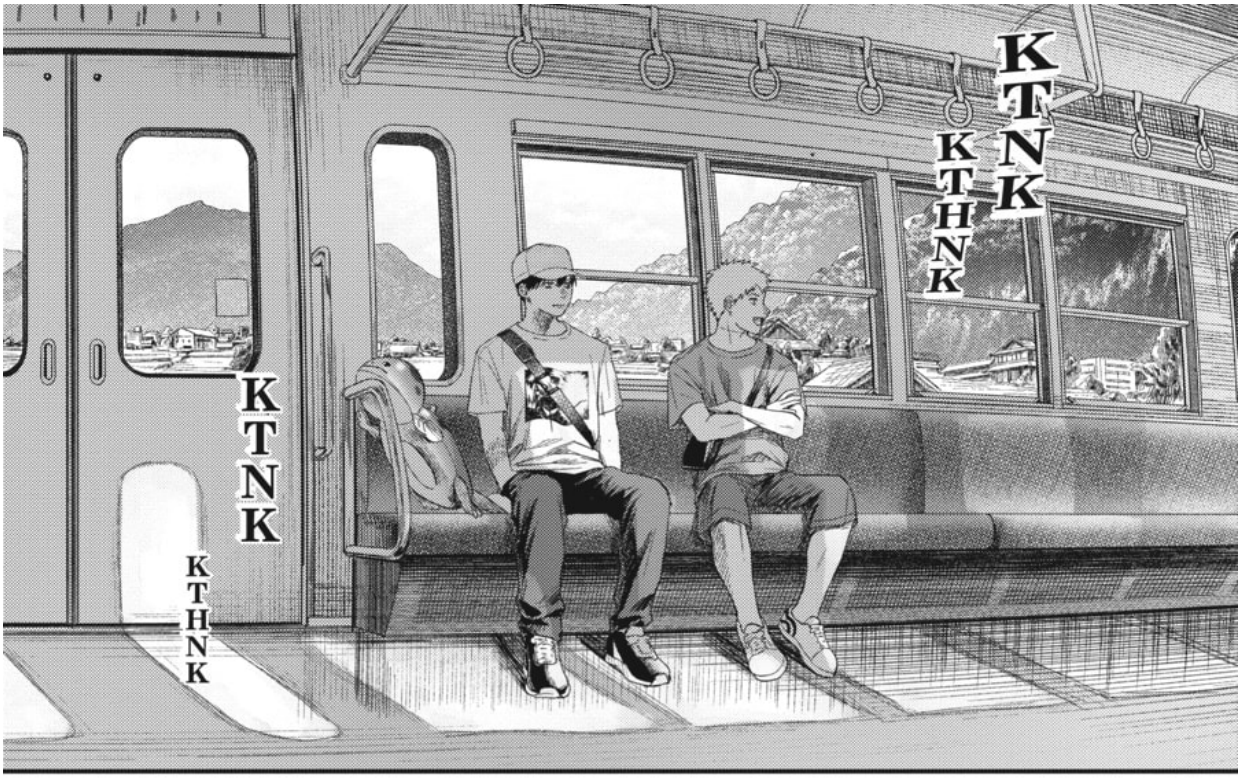
CREAK
ESPECIALLY THAT STUFF 'BOUT "GRANTIN' WISHES"...
...BUT FOR SOME REASON I'VE BEEN FORGETTIN' THINGS.
AND LATELY I'VE STARTED REMEMBERIN' BITS AN' PIECES.
CREAK
I... SHOULD...
I SORTA THINK THAT'S TRUE.
I FEEL LIKE... I CAN GRANT ANY WISH.
CREAK
...THAT'S SOME BIG TALK. HA-HA...
ANYTHIN'? FOR REAL?
AND FOR YOU, I'D GRANT ANY WISH Y'ASK FOR...

GO FOR IT.
YEAH.
...SOMETHING DANGEROUS MIGHT HAPPEN.
IF MY WISH... REALLY CAME TRUE, THEN...
HAAH...
...WE STILL DON'T KNOW HOW TO DEAL WITH THE IMPURITIES, WHICH ARE A PRETTY IMPORTANT PART OF ALL THIS...
EVEN IF WE KNOW WHAT NOUNUKI-SAMA IS...
CREAK
CREAK
.....
NAW. I'M GOOD.

IT'S JUST ONE CONFUSIN' THING AFTER ANOTHER POPPIN' UP.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT SKETCH WAS ABOUT EITHER...
HEEEY!
MUMBLE, MUMBLE, MMBL...
AH!
BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH

CHECK IT OUT, YOSHIKI!
MINCEY!!
.....
HE'S DAN-CIN'.
HE'S GOTTEN PRETTY USED TO YOU.
NAW, HE STILL HATES YA.

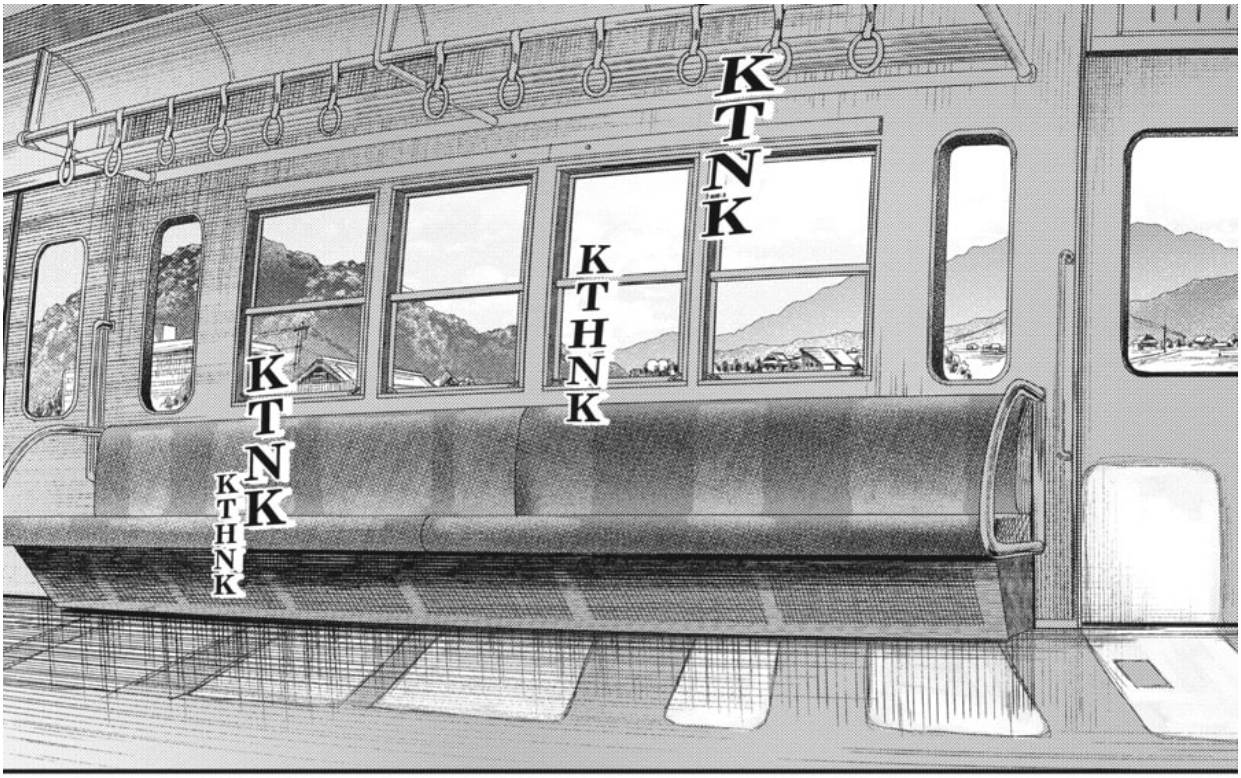
HEY...
HA HA HA!
HE'S STRONGER THAN HE LOOKS.
THAT PUNK. HE WAS JUST FISHIN' FOR A SQUEEZE TREAT?
BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH
IT'S SUMMER BREAK, AIN'T IT?
BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH BZZH
NO POINT IN JUST SITTIN' HERE AN' THINKIN' FOREVER.
I WANNA SEE IT AT LEAST ONCE.
HOW 'BOUT WE GO TO THE BEACH RIGHT NOW?

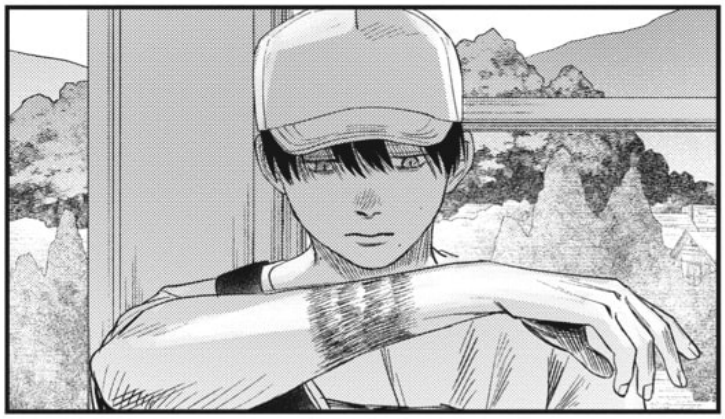

KTNK
KTHNK
KTNK
KTHNK

I HAVEN'T BEEN TO THE BEACH SINCE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.
IT'S ABOUT TWO HOURS FROM KIBOGAYAMA STATION ON THE TANSHOU LINE, HUH...?

YER SO CHILL ...

HOO-WEEEE!! HOT DAMN, WOULDJA LOOKIT THAT!!
WHAT'S THAT BUTT-LOOKIN' BUILDIN' OVER THERE!?


KTNK
KTHNK
KTNK
KTHNK

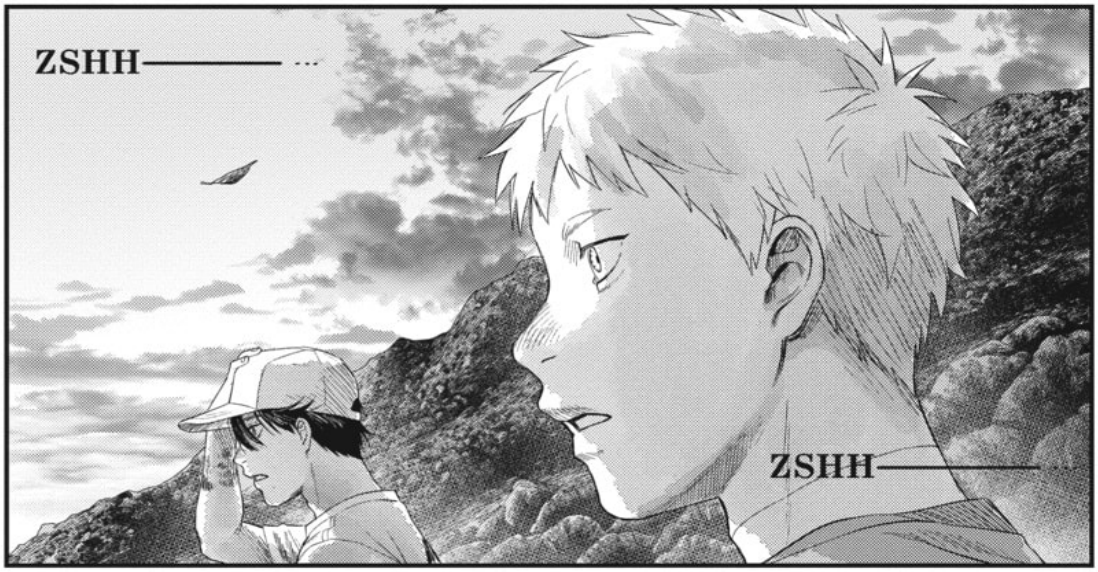


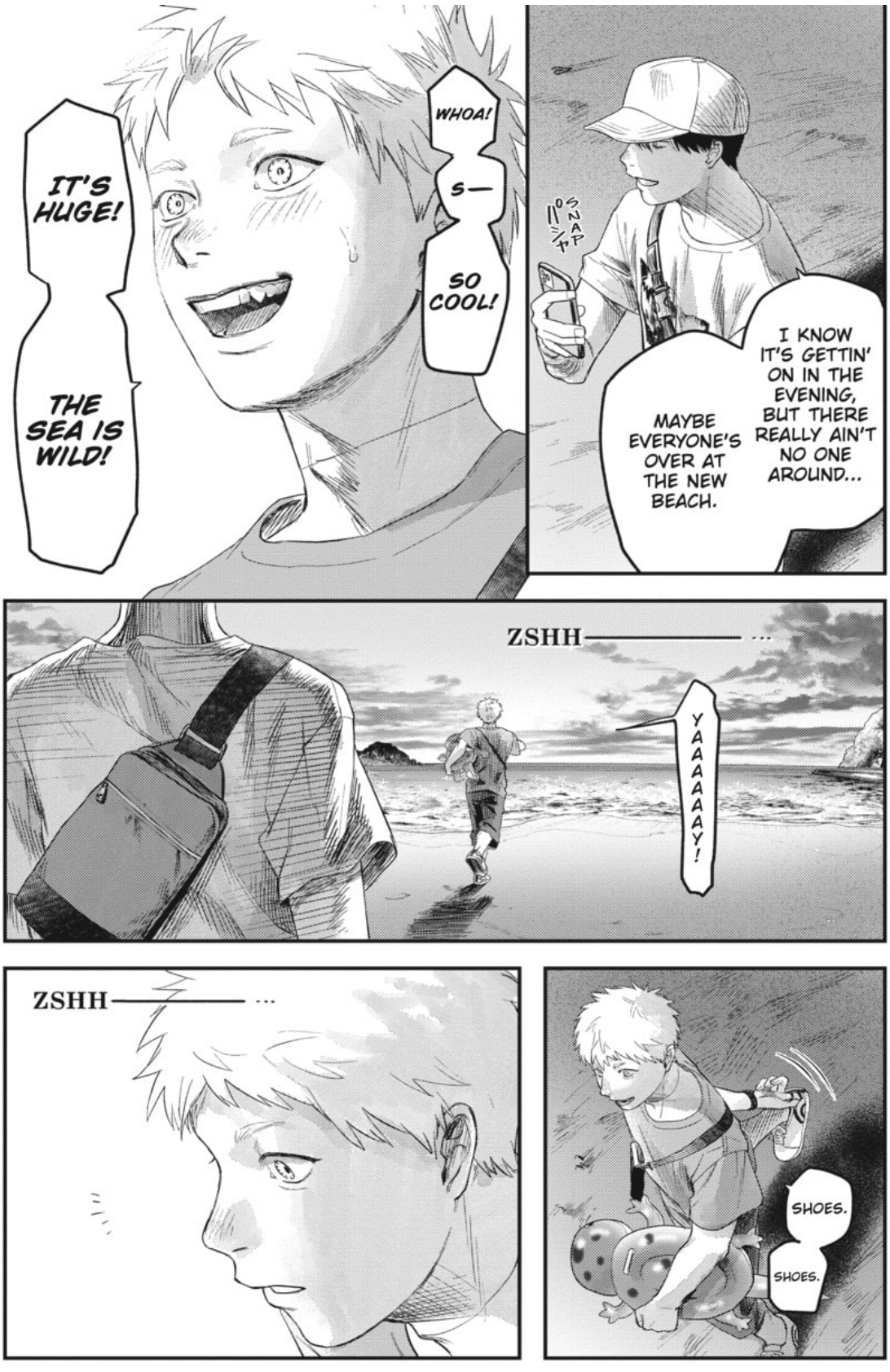
BY THE WAY, THE OTHER DAY...

...I HAD TO VISIT THE MIKASAS FOR SOMETHIN'...
BRING THIS OVER AS THANKS FOR KAORU'S YUKATA.
...SO I WENT TO THE SHRINE.
THEN, WHEN I GOT TO THE TORII GATE...
BZZT
バチッ
HUH? WHY ...?
DUNNO... WAS ABLE TO GO IN JUST FINE AFTER THAT, THOUGH.

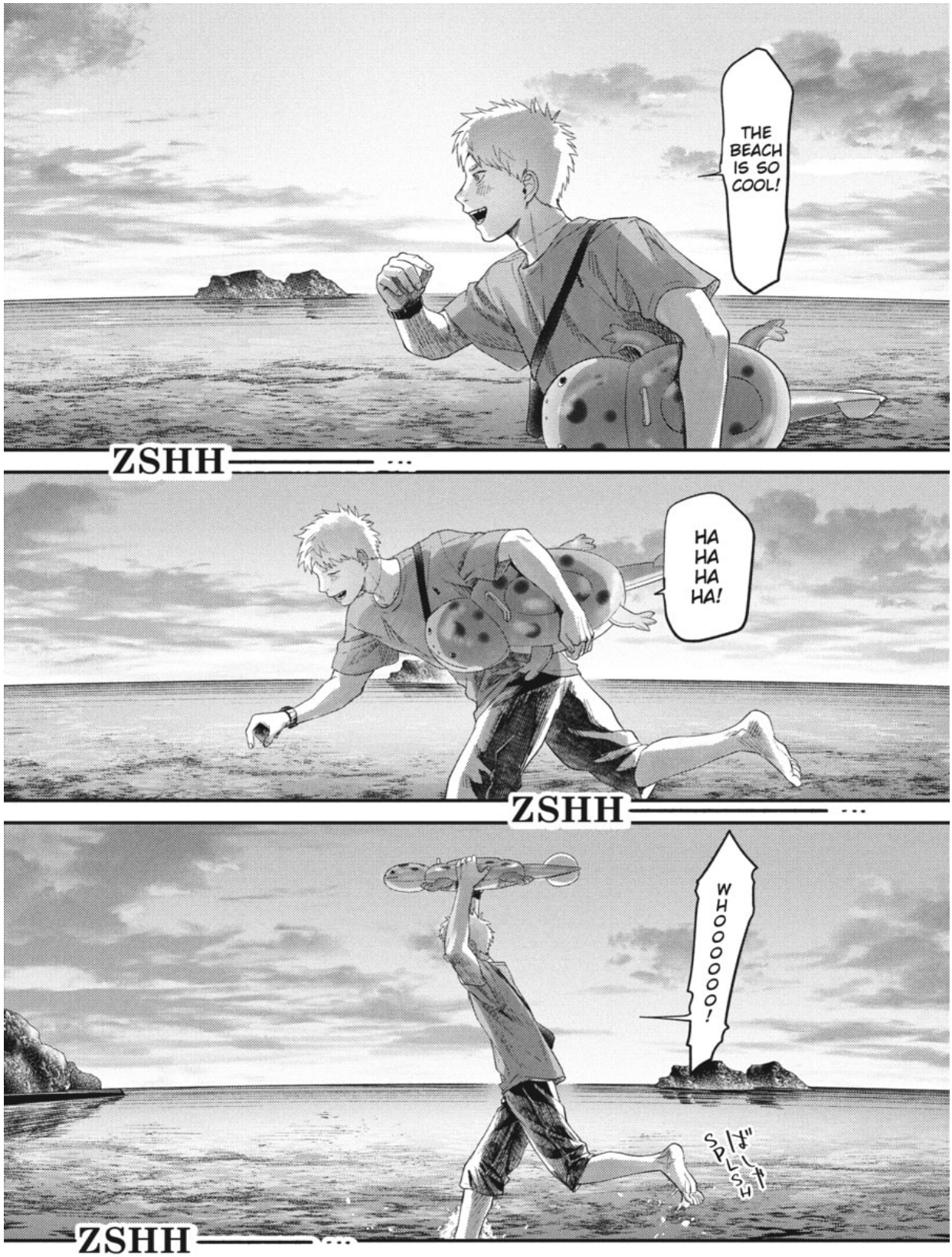
HAAH... LET'S STOP AND TALK ABOUT SOMETHIN' ELSE.
WE STILL GOT OVER AN HOUR TO GO.
"MAJIRIMONO"...
SOME-THIN' ELSE...
THERE AIN'T NOTHIN' ELSE.
ONLY THING I CAN THINK OF IS WHEN I STOPPED BY BEFORE AN' YOUR ROOM WAS CHOCK-FULL OF OLD-MAN SPIRITS. I WAS SERIOUSLY CRACKIN' UP...
KTNK KTHNK
KTNK KTHNK
KTNK KTHNK
YER KIDDIN', RIGHT?

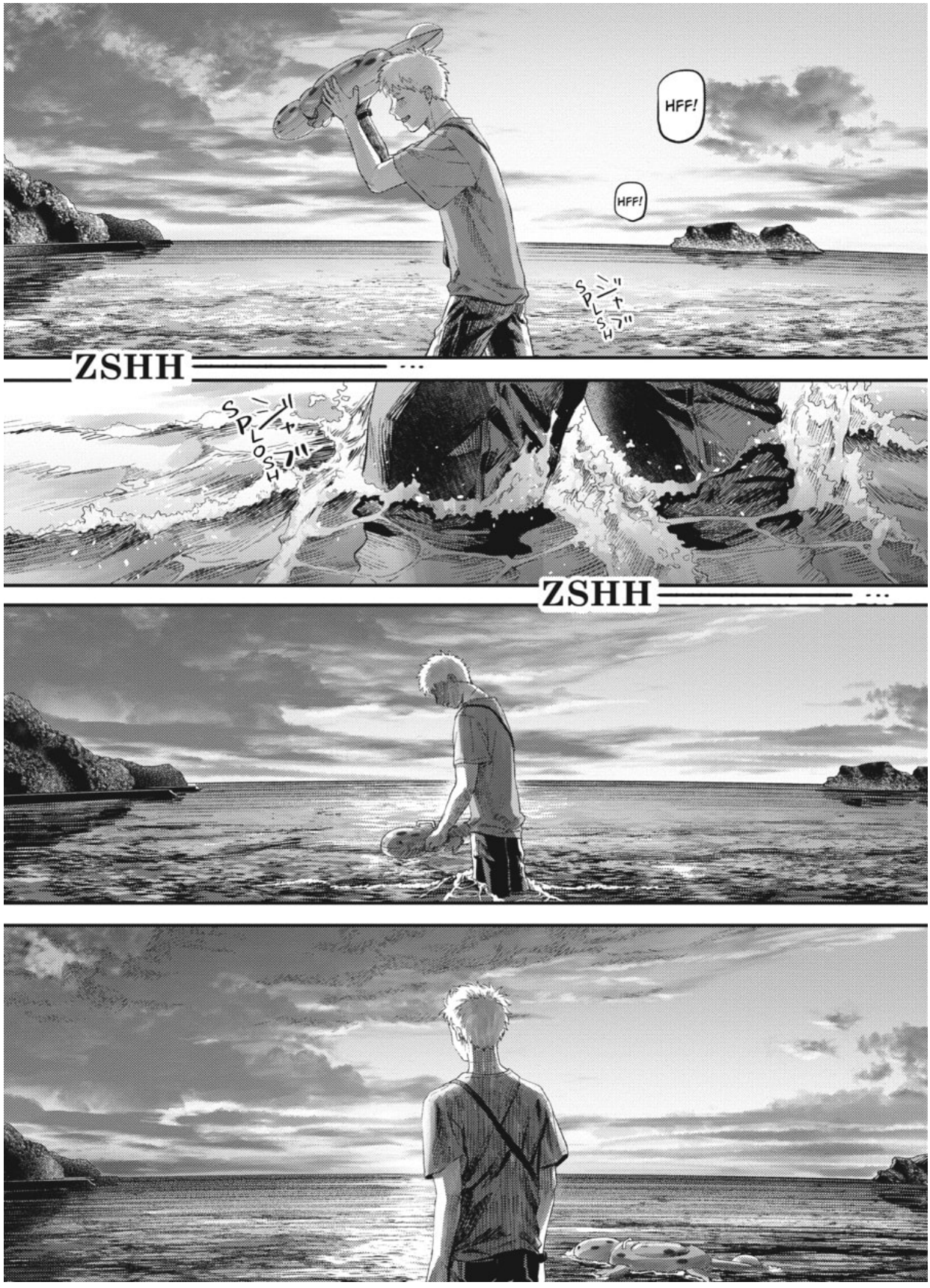
SHK


ZSHH———— …
ZSHH———— …


WHOA!
S—
SO COOL!
IT'S HUGE!
THE SEA IS WILD!
SNAP
カシャ
I KNOW IT'S GETTIN' ON IN THE EVENING, BUT THERE REALLY AIN'T NO ONE AROUND...
MAYBE EVERYONE'S OVER AT THE NEW BEACH.
ZSHH———— ...
YAAAAAAAY!
ZSHH———— ...
SHOES.
SHOES.

ZSHH———————…
HEY!
COME OVER HERE!
ZSHH———————…


THE BEACH IS SO COOL!
ZSHH
HA HA HA HA!
ZSHH
WHOOOOOOO!
SPLSH
ばしゃ
ZSHH


HFF!
HFF!
SPLASH
ジャブ
ZSHH
SPLASH
ジャブ
ZSHH

HEY.
YER GONNA GET YER PANTS ALL WET.
ZSHH
HEY, SO, WHEN WE ENTERED THE SHRINE...
...I ALSO REMEMBERED THE MOMENT WHEN I ENTERED HIKARU'S BODY.
ジャブ SPLOSH
ジャブ SPLOSH

HIKA-RU'S ...
AND GRANTIN' THAT WISH IS WHAT GOT ME HERE.
AS HIKARU WAS DYIN', I HEARD 'IM SAY...
..."IT'D BE GREAT IF NO ONE GOT SAD ABOUT THIS.
"I DON'T WANNA LEAVE YOSHIKI ALONE."
SO I...
...THINK I'M GONNA GO BACK TO THE MOUN-TAIN.
...BUT I'M SORRY.
I DON'T THINK I CAN FULFILL THAT WISH.

THE REASON I'VE BEEN ATTACKIN' YA RECENTLY...
...IS PROLLY 'COS MY TRUE NATURE'S COMIN' OUT.
...HUH?
I WANNA FILL THE EMPTINESS INSIDE ME...
...AND I GET THIRSTY FOR SOULS.
DON'T MAKE MUCH SENSE TO HUMANS.
BUT I STARTED REALIZIN' THAT MYSELF LATELY.
IT'S WHAT I'VE ALWAYS BEEN.
I'VE KILLED LOTSA PEOPLE, AND I MIGHT KILL AGAIN.
BUT I DON'T WANNA KILL YOU...
H—
HO—
HOLD ON, NOW...
HUH?

RETURNIN' TO THE MOUNTAINS MIGHT NOT EVEN BE A SUREFIRE SOLUTION...
...BUT IT SHOULD MAKE THINGS PEACEFUL WHILE YER ALIVE.
HUH? NO WAY.
YA CAN'T.
WHAT... WAS ALL THAT RESEARCH FOR, THEN...?
THE MONSTER GOES AWAY...
...YOU ACCEPT HIKARU'S DEATH...
...AND YOU MOVE FORWARD WITH YER LIFE AS A HUMAN BEING.
AND YOU ALL LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER.
THAT'D BE THE BEST ENDIN'.
YA JERK!
DON'T YA WANNA STAY HERE!?
YOU BEIN' DUMB OR SOME-THIN'?
IT'S FINE!!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO... REALIZIN' ALL THAT STUFF!!
SPLASH
ハシャッ
SPLASH

JUST KEEP BEIN' WHO YOU ARE, AN' WITHOUT BEIN' ASHAMED OF NOTHIN'.
THING IS...
...THE REAL HIKARU LIKED WATERMELON, BUT I LIKE ICE CREAM THE BEST.
AN' I LIKE PAPICCO MORE'N GACHIGACHI-KUN.
I PROLLY LIKE CATS MORE'N HIM TOO.
AND MOVIES.
NO SUCH THING AS A BORIN' MOVIE FOR ME.
HIKARU HATED STUDYIN', BUT I LOVE IT.
WELL, I AIN'T ANY GOOD AT IT, THOUGH. HA-HA!

STOP ...
STOP IT!
I...
WELL...
...IT WAS REAL FUN BEIN' WITH YA, YOSHIKI...
MAYBE I WAS JUST A REPLACEMENT FOR THE REAL HIKARU TO YA...
...BUT YA GAVE A LOT TO SOMEONE LIKE ME.
AND I LOVE YA.
THIS FEELIN' PROLLY AIN'T NOTHIN' LIKE ROMANTIC LOVE OR FRIENDSHIP.
BUT IT'S TRULY HOW I FEEL.
NOT AS HIKARU, BUT AS THE MONSTER I AM.

YO-
SHIKI.
NO,
THAT
AIN'T
...
NO!
THANKS
FOR
EVERYTHIN'.

AIN'T NO OTHER WAY...
IT'S JUST HOW IT GOES.
SPLASH
SPLASH
I DON'T THINK OF YOU AS HIKARU ANYMORE!
YER NOT A REPLACE-MENT FOR THE REAL HIKARU!!!
YER JUST GIVIN' UP!
DON'T PUSH THAT "MOVIN' FORWARD" BULLSHIT ON ME...
IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT...
TO HELL WITH "HAPPILY EVER AFTER"...!!
DON'T GIMME THAT CRAP ...!!!!

I ALSO—
GOIN' BACK TO THE MOUNTAIN WON'T DO A DAMN THING.

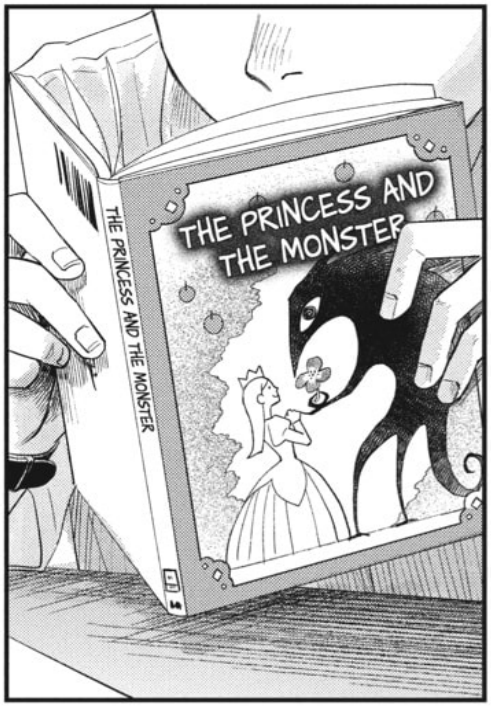
BECAUSE Y'SEE, HIKARU-KUN...

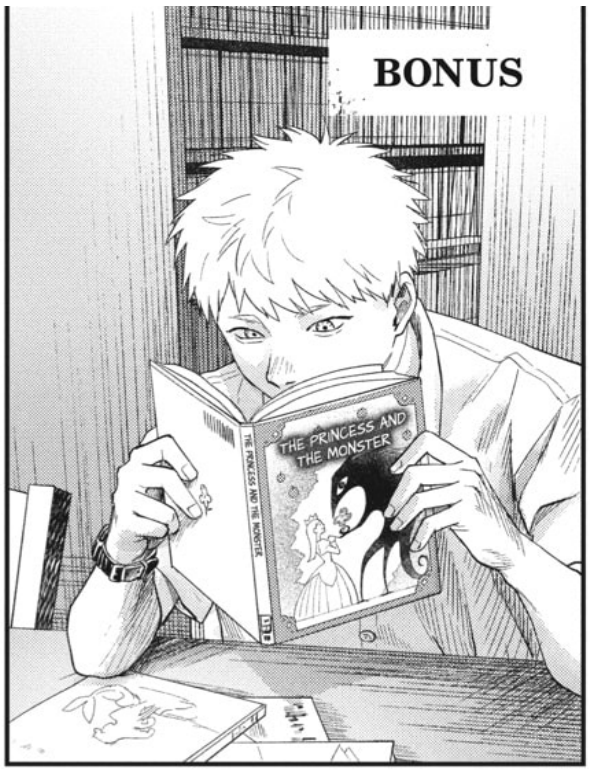
...YOU'RE NOT NOUNUKI-SAMA.

THIS WHOLE "SACRIFICING ONE THING TO SAVE ANOTHER" IDEA...
...IS A TERRIBLE MISCON-CEPTION.
VOLUME 5 END

CHECK IT OUT, KAORU. I GOTCHA A GIFT.
IT'S A PLUSHIE OF A RHINOCEROS BEETLE LARVA.
YA SAID YA WANTED SOMETHIN' CUTE, RIGHT?
THAT AIN'T CUTE ...
HUH?
YOSHIKI 13 YRS OLD
KAORU 9 YRS OLD

SLIGHTLY ANNOYING THINGS ABOUT YOSHIKI


THE PRINCESS AND THE MONSTER
THE PRINCESS AND THE MONSTER


BONUS
THE PRINCESS AND THE MONSTER
THE PRINCESS AND THE MONSTER

YOU'VE... BEEN INTO READING PICTURE BOOKS AND FAIRY TALES LATELY, HUH?

OH, THIS?

PICTURE BOOKS'RE THE EASIEST TO UNDER-STAND.
WELL, I DON'T REALLY GET HUMANS...
...SO I'M STUDYIN' THEM.
I HATE THAT FAIRY TALE.
LEARNIN' MORAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS, HUH?
WHY?
A MAN-EATING MONSTER FALLS IN LOVE WITH A PRINCESS, REPENTS FOR ALL SORTS OF THINGS HE DID, AND THEN MARRIES HER.
IT'S WAY TOO CONVENIENT.

POP
FROM THE MONSTER'S POINT OF VIEW, A TRUE HAPPY ENDING WOULD BE HAVING THE PRINCESS JOIN HIM IN EATING PEOPLE.
AND A MONSTER FALLING IN LOVE IS JUST...I MEAN, IF IT REPRODUCED ASEXUALLY, THEN THAT CONCEPT WOULDN'T REGISTER WITH HIM TO BEGIN WITH.
MUMBLE
MUMBLE
MUMBLE
LIKE, IT PUSHES THIS IDEA THAT GETTING DRESSED UP AND EATING CAKE IN A CASTLE IS BLISS.
THE WHOLE THING'S JUST HUMAN-CENTRIC AND ARROGANT.
I HATE IT JUST ABOUT AS MUCH AS THOSE ANIMAL SHOWS WHERE PEOPLE DUB OVER DOGS.
I wuv my master
MUMBLE
...
THE WAY YER GOIN' ON ABOUT IT IS KINDA CREEPY! HA-HA!
YOU MUST REALLY HATE IT!!

IT'S INTERESTIN' TO LEARN ABOUT THINGS THAT'RE DIFFERENT FROM YERSELF.
EVEN IF I DON'T GET IT, IT'S STILL INTERESTIN'.
... SHUT UP.
BUT YER RIGHT THAT IT'S TOLD FROM A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE. THAT'S WHY IT'S GOOD FOR ME.
...THAT I COULD TEACH HIM.
BUT... I USED TO ALSO THINK...
I'LL HAVE TO TEACH HIM.

...AND TRIED APPLYIN' HUMAN VALUES TO HIM.
I ASSUMED HE WAS JUST IMMATURE...
I'M THE ARROGANT ONE HERE.
...THAT HIKARU WILL NEVER BE HUMAN...
THE SITUATION WITH ASAKO ALREADY MADE IT CLEAR...
THIS SCENE'S FUNNY!
HA HA HA HA!

I DON'T REALLY GET HIS HUMOR.
HA HA HA HA!
DEPENDS ON YER TASTE, RIGHT!?
Humans aren't tasty at all.
Chicken tastes much better!
DEEP DOWN, HE MAY WANT TO EAT HUMANS...
...BUT HE WON'T.
I THINK THAT'S KINDA NICE.
BUT THIS MONSTER LEARNED HE COULD GET BY WITHOUT EATIN' PEOPLE.
I THINK THIS SORT OF THING'S IMPORTANT.

YEAH, YEAH!
THAT'S WHY I WANNA LEARN ABOUT HUMANS.
THE PRINCESS AND THE MONSTER
THE PRINCESS AND THE MONSTER
BUT I THINK THE PRINCESS SHOULD GET TO KNOW THE MONSTER MORE.
INSTEAD OF TURNING THE MONSTER HUMAN...
...SHE REALLY HAS TO LEARN WHAT'S DIFFERENT...
...AND WHAT'S THE SAME BETWEEN THEM.
AND I WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT YOU TOO...
カチ
CLICK
YEAH.

BONUS END

Q&A

Q How has Yoshiki's father's behavior affected Yoshiki?

—— Yoshiki's parents argue often, but although his father isn't the type to really talk back whenever they do fight, he expresses his feelings by slamming doors. He's also been more withdrawn ever since Hikaru's father died. Yoshiki grew up seeing his father struggle with communication, and that's led him to resent his father and feel disgusted as he sees himself becoming more and more like him over the years.

Q What types of music are Hikaru, "Hikaru," and Yoshiki into?

—— Hikaru often listened to J-rock and anime theme songs. "Hikaru" listens to anything, but he's easily moved by lyrics. Yoshiki likes gloomy tracks without lyrics and often listens to them alone in his room.

Q I'm curious to know how "Hikaru" feels about Kaoru! At the summer festival in Volume 2, it was heartwarming to see Kaoru being led by "Hikaru's" hand and also holding hands with her older brother, Yoshiki.

—— When Hikaru was alive, Kaoru was something like a real little sister to him, and he always looked out for her. He wasn't as attentive as Yoshiki, but Hikaru often acted subconsciously to help Kaoru. At the summer festival, those actions from the real Hikaru were also expressed through "Hikaru." Since becoming "Hikaru," he's been programmed to see her as a "sisterlike, precious entity," so he might seem somewhat cold from Kaoru's perspective.

Q Does "Hikaru" possess all of the real Hikaru's sensory memories from any given time? Is it like the smells, sounds, and all the emotions felt at a certain time are left over as "Hikaru's memories"?

—— Yes. However, for "Hikaru," it's like having a thick dictionary of "Hikaru's memories" suddenly crammed into his head, so even when he experiences something the real Hikaru has already experienced, it feels new to "Hikaru."

Q Based on the illustrations and other things you've drawn so far, it almost seems like "Hikaru" might not feel cold. But when it comes to his perception of heat, what does "Hikaru" feel? In the story, he says things like "Hoo-ee! It's hot as hell!" and uses a fan, so it seems like he can feel heat more than cold...

—— He doesn't have an instinctual fear of death, so he feels hot and cold merely as enjoyable sensations. His pain tolerance is also high, so he doesn't mind when his limbs go numb from the cold, and if he gets severely sunburned, he recovers from it quickly.

Q How many other types of Labor Cat mascots are there besides the cat that grew its hair out? And which of those cats is the most popular?

——There are several, including Boycott Cat and Boss Cat. The main character, Labor Cat, is the most traditional and has been a huge hit with high school girls.

Q Could you rank Yoshiki, "Hikaru," Asako, Yuuki, and Maki in terms of intelligence!?

—— From smartest to dumbest, it's Yoshiki → Asako → Yuuki, followed by Maki and "Hikaru," who are equally the dumbest. By the way, "Hikaru" gets the same grades that Hikaru did when he was alive, but while Hikaru hated studying, "Hikaru" enjoys it. However, he doesn't really understand what's going on in class.

Q Among Yoshiki and his friends, who's the best at art? And who's not so great at it?

——The best artist is Asako. Maki also likes to copy anime art, so he's surprisingly good at drawing. Yuuki makes art that's so bad it's good. Yoshiki is very attentive to detail in his art but often messes up the balance. Hikaru (and "Hikaru") was the worst at art.

Q When did Kurebayashi-san first discover she was able to return impurities to the other side?

—— She's been able to see impurities ever since she was a child but first sent an impurity back to the other side when she was in high school. It caused quite a stir at the time, so she has since lived her life hiding her ability. However, inadvertently helping some people with her ability has caused rumors of her to spread, which is a bit of a problem for her.

Q Mokumokuren-sensei, do you use analog art materials or digital tools?

—— I draw everything entirely digitally.

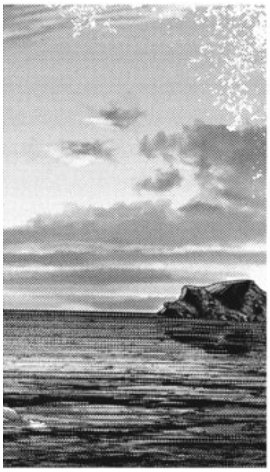
Afterword

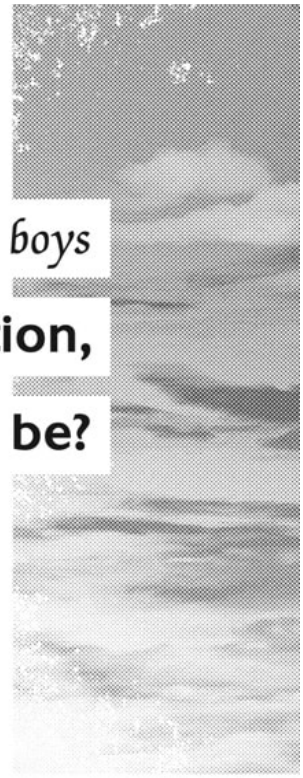
THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR READING VOLUME 5. I ORIGINALLY PLANNED FOR *THE SUMMER HIKARU DIED* TO CONSIST OF THREE BASIC PARTS, WITH VOLUMES 1–3 BEING THE "DAILY LIFE ARC," VOLUMES 4–5 BEING THE "MYSTERY SOLVING ARC," AND VOLUME 6 BEING THE START OF A WHOLE NEW PART. THERE'S STILL MORE TO COME, SO I HOPE YOU'LL CONTINUE SUPPORTING THE SERIES!

ASSISTANT:
NOMU
THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

THERE WAS A QUESTION ABOUT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I SWITCHED THEIR HAIRCUTS, SO I WENT AHEAD AND TRIED IT OUT.

Next Volume Preview

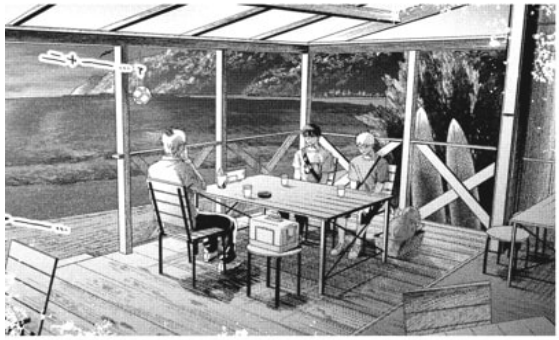




Tanaka appears before the boys

with **a proposition,**

but **what could it be?**



THE SUMMER

HIKARU DIED

continues in Volume 6...

THE SUMMER

HIKARU

DIED

TRANSLATION NOTES

COMMON HONORIFICS

***-san*:** The Japanese equivalent of Mr./Mrs./Miss. If a situation calls for politeness, this is the fail-safe honorific.
***-sama*:** Conveys great respect; may also indicate that the social status of the speaker is lower than that of the addressee.
***-kun*:** Used most often when referring to boys, this indicates affection or familiarity. Occasionally used by older men among their peers, but it may also be used by anyone referring to a person of lower standing.
***-chan*:** An affectionate honorific indicating familiarity used mostly in reference to girls; also used in reference to cute persons or animals regardless of gender.
no honorific: Indicates familiarity or closeness; if used without permission or reason, addressing someone in this manner would constitute an insult.
***-(o)nii/nee, nii-san/nee-san, aniki/aneki*:** Terms of endearment meaning "big brother" and "big sister" that may be more widely used to address any person who is like a sibling, regardless of whether they are related or not.

GENERAL

Hikaru: The Chinese character for Hikaru's name means "light."

PAGE 49

Nisayama: The Chinese characters used for this location name refer to cinnabar, the primary ore mineral of mercury, known for its bright-red hue.

PAGE 52

MINE: A reference to a popular Japanese social media app on which users can text, share images or videos, and make phone calls.

PAGE 83

Indou: The Indous' family name is composed of the Chinese character for "taboo" or "abhorrent," and the Chinese character for "shrine."

PAGE 156

Yukata: A lightweight Japanese kimono, typically worn in summer.

Torii: Found at the entrances of Shinto shrines, these traditional red gates mark the transition to a sacred space.

PAGE 168

Papicco: A reference to a frozen dessert packaged in tubes.

Gachigachi-kun: A reference to a brand of ice candy with a crunchy texture.

THE SUMMER

HIKARU DIED

MOKUMOKUREN

5

TRANSLATION: AJANI OLOYE

LETTERING: ABIGAIL BLACKMAN

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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